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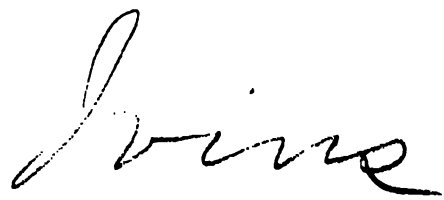
5

WINGS OF THE CARDINAL

BERTHA CROWELL



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WINGS OF THE CARDINAL

BY

BERTHA CROWELL

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TO MY MOTHER

WINGS OF THE CARDINAL

WINGS OF THE CARDINAL

CHAPTER I

"HE'll marry me!" she said quite simply, for all her flash of anger.

"You are very sure of yourself," the older woman returned gravely.

"I am. I have to be," answered Ferol.

The woman and the girl sat together in a bare, shabby room of Mrs. Tarver's boarding house in a village of west Texas. The girl held herself proudly. The woman's tone was an appeal. Ferol sat, a straight slim figure, erect in the chair. There was no defiance in her eyes, rather an expression of complete competency. An occasional stirring of mobile lips was her only movement.

The older woman regarded her critically. The beauty of the classic mouth cut in the curve of a true Cupid's bow showed a tendency to droop at the corners. The line of her chin was rounded and full, like that of some ample Greek goddess; a nose somewhat large and inclined delicately downward from arch to tip; her eyes were grey,

shallow and cold at the moment; their expression neither sullen nor bold, but searching.

"Aren't you afraid?"

"No," said the girl, her lips forming a cold smile. "I'm not afraid, Mrs. Hill."

They faced each other across a gulf of misunderstanding; the inheritance of each, foreign to the other; birth, time, environment widening the distance between; ambition and sympathy striving to bridge the space. The girl felt herself drawn irresistibly toward the woman; toward the forces which she represented in the younger woman's mind,—education, gentle manner, wealth. Yet she divined an attack upon her own small precious bundle of convictions, and braced herself accordingly.

But Mrs. Hill recognized that she had strength to deal with in this young girl; that sympathy would not open the flood-gates of speech in this instance. Her gaze wandered to the open window, her mind seeking vaguely some method of appeal. Outside the plumes of the tamarisk hung low, every feathery frond dripping beads of moisture; the sun was shining for a brief space, between persistent rains. A cardinal flashed past the window from tamarisk to china tree, on to the live oak and back upon the same course in wanton joy of life and light. Alive, free, calling, demanding —as sure of itself as this young girl. Mrs. Hill's delicate, invalid's face suddenly bloomed, a smile

of understanding born of secret depths of joy and suffering in her own heart. She leaned forward toward the girl with a gesture of tenderness, "Tell me," she said.

Ferol smiled back, though reservedly. "I'll tell you," she said, "because I want you to respect me." She paused a moment, looking down into her lap at her slim, folded fingers.

"I'm self made," she said, lifting her head proudly. "Up to the time I was grown I lived on a ranch. I never had but one year's schoolin' in my life. I've read all the books I could get my hands on. What I am I've made myself be. I've got a mother——" Ferol stopped speaking to swallow hard. Her words delayed for a moment. Her voice had softened on the word "mother," spoken in the sweetest tone possible, full of love, pathos, depth.

"I love my mother better than anything else in the world. My mother's poor. She and my father are both sick. I've got a kid brother an' some little sisters. I have to take care of 'em. Two years ago I went to work in the Racket Store. I made two dollars a week. I couldn't make enough. I borrowed some money from the man I worked for to study stenography. I went to night school at the business college. When I could do the work, the boss gave me the letters and the books to keep. I make nine dollars a week now. Sometimes I earn four or five dollars extra by

outside work nights and Sundays. I never have made more than fifty dollars a month. It takes nearly all that to keep my mother. I have to pay rent, buy food. Dad——. Sometimes there has to be medicine an' a doctor. I've got to have money. This man——" she hesitated a moment. "He knows just how it is. He has promised me to take care of them. He——"

"You believe him?" Mrs. Hill interrupted.

"Believe him!" the girl exclaimed, "of course I believe him. I know that man well. He's come here two winters now. The folks around here—Mrs. Tarver's seen him. He's crazy about me. One night after I come to Mrs. Tarver's to live, after my folks had moved back to the country,—I told him I never would marry him. That night he walked up and down under my window all night. Another time when I told him to go away and not bother me again, he climbed up that Chinaberry tree onto the gallery. He tapped at my window and begged me, 'For God's safe, Ferol, say just one kind word to me. I can't sleep; I can't live, if you don't!' "

"And you believed him?" Mrs. Hill purposely reiterated.

"You don't know everything," the girl flared up.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Hill again, very gently.

"He loaned me money to pay back my boss for the night school. I couldn't save it. When my

mother needed a doctor an' medicine, he got 'em for her," she paused, her lips dry, her throat aching.

Mrs. Hill waited breathlessly for the girl to go on.

"One day that first winter after we come to town, he walked home with me from work. He'd been hangin' round about two months then. At the gate he was beggin' me some more. He leaned over the gate an' whispered to me, 'I love you.' I flashed back, 'I hate you,' an' ran into the house. Mother was in bed sick. She was cryin'. My kid brother did the housework, and you know a boy ain't very nice about such things." Again the girl's voice took on the tender inflection as in speaking her mother's name. Love seemed to well up from her heart and flood into her voice. Her tone made apology for the boy's lack of skill.

"I said, 'What's the matter, mother?' She just looked up at me and put her arms around my neck an' cried. I said to myself right then, 'I'll do it. I'll do anything for my mother.' "

Mrs. Hill's divining scrutiny passed over the girl as she sat listening. The high forehead bespoke mental powers; beauty of form and colouring were Ferol's to a remarkable degree; and beyond that, personality, force. The reddish hair, parted boyishly at one side and fluffed out over the white brow and down over the ears, made a halo which cancelled in effect the baldness of the

forehead, softened the face, emphasising its femininity. The rich pink and white complexion which so often accompanies red hair drew attention from the strength of the girl's features. The bright colour in her face paled as it sank into a soft shadowed place at the base of her throat; under the curved, voluptuous chin the skin bloomed white and fine as satin on her bosom, with an underlying hint of delicate blue veins. She was slender, with small bust, tiny waist, and scarcely distinguishable hips. Somewhat of the boy was suggested in the straight slim figure under the blue serge skirt and white cotton shirtwaist open at the throat under a flat, cheap lace collar and sleeves rolled back neatly above the elbows. She was trim, scrupulously clean and brushed, though shabby. Her lean bright figure compelled attention. The expression in her grey eyes at times was decidedly repellent, and again, an eager fire, quenched by hastily lowered eyelids, as though to reassume her mask.

Ferol's voice was a lure and a delight; low, well modulated and capable of every quality of tone and richness of meaning. She controlled it perfectly. This gift was unique and unexpected in a country where the shrill, high voices of the women were commonly lifted to a sweet whine. Mrs. Hill felt the power of this engaging quality the moment the girl began to speak. Her self control was remarkable. Not once did her voice

break; yet many times she stopped speaking to swallow the lump which appeared to pass downward through the delicate throat. It recalled a certain actress able to make this simple movement visible from the stage—a trick which never failed to break with tears the tense silence of a crowded house.

The gifts of this young creature fascinated the older woman. As she studied the girl she felt herself baffled,—continually aware that she lacked the key to that poise which gave dignity to ignorance, force to the unequivocal egotism of Ferol Rankin. As though fearing to have said too much, the girl sat silent, turning and turning again the diamond ring upon her finger. It was a large stone, white, of fine quality. This symbol alone on the girl's finger started a train of thought in Mrs. Hill's mind.

"Why didn't you marry him then, in the beginning?" she asked.

Ferol flashed a look at Mrs. Hill swiftly, shrewdly. "You promise you'll never tell? Well, then—he couldn't marry me. He had a wife. He's just got a divorce now. That's why he's sent for me to come."

"Why doesn't he come after you?"

"Nobody here would marry me to a divorced man," answered Ferol simply, then added, "My folks wouldn't let me either."

Mrs. Hill sat a moment in silence, puzzled, baf-

fled. Then she asked the girl gently, "Do you love him?"

Ferol only shook her head negatively in reply.

"Is he——" Mrs. Hill hesitated and coloured slightly. "Is he ever repulsive to you?" she asked, seeking to be assured of the girl's future happiness.

Ferol smiled though the colour deepened in her cheeks. "Not always. Sometimes I feel as though I couldn't stand him—but——" She hesitated only to go on in a different tone, seriously, even fiercely, "If he's good to my mother, I'll be good to him."

"And if he's not?"

"I'll kill him," Ferol replied.

CHAPTER II

MRS. HILL had come into west central Texas seeking a mild, dry climate for the raw winter months at home. Unexpectedly she had found rain and winds and discomfort. After four years of drought, the thirsty land was getting its fill, drinking in the rain until no longer able to function, when the water spread in pools, in ponds, finally lakes.

Upon the upper gallery of the flimsy grey frame building of Mrs. Tarver's boarding house, swathed in wraps, Mrs. Hill sat in a creaking rocking chair, looking out over the dripping, water-logged town; shivering from the melancholy of the scene as well as from the damp and penetrating air. Her mind turned toward Ferol Rankin. The melodramatic stuff of the girl's story of the day before still persisted in her thoughts; a diamond ring, secret marriage, threatened killing! What nonsense! The girl was a mere child. Yet how young these southern girls married; how foolish to fill up their early youth with babies, and their maturity with ailments and regrets. But this girl with the asking eyes and tawny hair was different somehow. An education,—a chance

was what she needed; not marriage surely; not yet.

A cheery voice from within aroused Mrs. Hill. She arose wearily, weakly, and stood staring down into the wet, sticky mass of mud in the street. The hound sheltered under the house across the way bayed mournfully. Mrs. Hill examined the path leading to the gate.

In another forty-eight hours she would be out of all this, into the high dry country of the far west. She turned shivering and passed through the long French window into the bedroom. It was indeed a bare and cheerless room, with curtains pinned back to let in the grey light, an ample bed, a few old chairs. By a small table drawn near to the stove, a woman stood removing the cloth covering from a tray, arranging dishes with slow movements of small hands. She glanced up quickly as Mrs. Hill entered the room, gazing shrewdly into the weary, pallid face.

"One of our old Texas rains!" she exclaimed cheerfully. "All last summer, when we needed it so bad, not a drop could we get, an' now look at it. Hateful thing! Jus' comin' down so the groun' can't hold it and startin' floods an' trouble." As she talked Mrs. Tarver slipped some dry pieces of wood into the air-tight stove, which immediately set to roaring lustily.

"Is your tea hot enough, Mrs. Hill?" she asked

as the sick woman sat down beside the table. "This weather sure is hard on anybody that's sick!"

Mrs. Hill sipped her tea fastidiously. The shabby room irked her; even Mrs. Tarver's loose and billowing figure bit into her sensitive consciousness. The modest little hotel was the best the town afforded, but the slipshod method and complacent incompetency of the community had begun to get on Mrs. Hill's nerves.

The stove began to throw out a genial heat. The warmth stimulated her and the taut nervous lines relaxed in her face. "Sit down, Mrs. Tarver," she begged, looking up pleadingly into Mrs. Tarver's soft brown eyes. She put a coaxing hand upon the plump curved figure beside her. "Ah, do," she urged. "Tell me of Ferol? Is she going?"

Mrs. Tarver sat down in another rocking chair and permitted her uncorseted figure comfortably to expand. She was a busy woman, what with family and cares of a large boarding house, but she could always relax. She leaned back in the chair and put out two very small slippered feet toward the stove. Her kind eyes were troubled momentarily and her good heart torn over this Ferol Rankin, but she could still take her ease.

"Yes, I reckon she's boun' to go. Seems like nobody could stop her. Milt Foster was here last night again. He begged her, too. I could hear

'em out on the gallery. If it wasn't for that family of no-accounts, she could marry Milt." Mrs. Tarver's voice was high, her slurring southern drawl soothing and unhurried. "Milt's crazy about her and he's one of our nice young boys, too. But no young boy wants that family on his hands. If Ferol didn't have so much nerve an' energy she couldn't carry that load long herself. She's fairly work brittle. Don't seem right in a girl her age. Still I was married an' had two children at her age, seventeen. Yes'm, that's her age. She was sixteen when she come to me a year ago and jus' begged me to take her in. Mr. Tarver didn't like the idea much. Girls that work mostly lives in their homes in Texas. Her folks was here for a while but I reckon she couldn't keep 'em jus' to suit 'em in town, so they moved out on a farm again. Mr. Tarver told me I'd no call to be takin' her in when she had kin folks in town she could live with. But my lands! what kin folks! Too ornery for any use. I ain't blamin' her for wantin' to get a little higher. She never could get ahead with them hangin' around. An' she's touchous about her kin, too!

"I don't know how much Ferol makes, but she allus pays for her room right on time. It's small an' I don't charge her much. She ain't got any clothes to speak of and she says she sends all her spare money to her folks, but that big diamond ring don't look any too becomin' on her finger.

Not to me. Girls workin' like she is ain't got no call for diamond rings. That man gave it to her, she says. Mr. Tarver wants me to write to her mother what she's up to, but I couldn't be that mean. What the girl's told me she expects me to keep. An' I respect her for her nerve, too. She's a good girl at heart. She's allus behaved herself around here. Ain't never so much as looked at a drummer." Mrs. Tarver paused as leisurely as she discoursed.

Mrs. Hill filled in the lull, encouragingly, "She carries herself well, I've noticed that."

"She's handsome like her pa, the old rascal!" continued Mrs. Tarver. "Some says he's a veterinary an' they do call him Doc, some of 'em, but I never heard of anybody or any beast he ever cured, or killed for that matter. He's the kind likes to sit around talkin' hard times and chippin' open pecans with his knife. That's what he does while her mamma and the chillen work in the fields."

"In the fields!" exclaimed Mrs. Hill, pausing in her eating, in astonishment.

Mrs. Tarver smiled pityingly for such ignorance of Texas condition. "My, yes," she replied, "they all do. These tenants couldn't make enough on the farms to raise their families if it wasn't for the women and chillen choppin' and pickin' cotton. An' I reckon they don't make

more'n enough to keep soul in body then, from the way they move on the first of every year."

"Why doesn't the mother work some other way?" asked Mrs. Hill.

"Law, she's too proud to work in anybody's kitchen! She's jus' ordinary and triflin', but I do say she's got an honest eye. Her pa takes coke, so I've heard 'em say, but you can't believe all you hear. He come here one day an' slipped that ring the girl wears and traded him a horse. But she made him back out of the trade an' got her ring back all right. She's smart. The man she works for says she's the smartest girl he ever had, a reg'lar diamond in the rough, he calls her. Seems like it's a pity a girl like that couldn't 'a' had a good education. But that sure is hard to get for the poor whites in Texas.

"A man I had in the north room two winters used to say there was more educational institutions and less education in the state of Texas than any state he'd ever been in. He said it right, too, but I reckon he was sort a prejudiced, bein' a Yank. There was a might a truth in what he said about the Texas women erectin' so many Confederate monuments. He had it they'd 'a' done more good an' less harm if they'd spent that money diggin' sewers. Come typhoid time that summer an' I jus' remembered what he said.

"If that Ferol could 'a' put the time in school she worked in the cotton field, she wouldn't have

to get married for a livin' for her family. Country schoolin' ain't what it might be. Bad roads in winter, everybody grudgin' money for improvements, an' old timers like her pa too proud to work but not ashamed to let their chillen and women folks do it for 'em.

"I've heard her pa talk about these new-fangled ideas about farmin'. Sat out there on that gallery one day waitin' for Ferol to come home an' give him some money. Said all he needed to farm with was rain. Got awful funny about these smart young agricultural college chaps tryin' to teach their grandfathers how to suck eggs. I got right mad. I said, 'Yes, rain, an' brains,—that's about all it does take to farm, that an' a little hard work.' We had it 'roun' an' 'roun'. Got so mad he went off without waitin' for Ferol, but he was back before night. He knows where to go when he gets in a tight. She allus helps him out.

"But I'm boun' to say," continued Mrs. Tarver, garrulously returning to her chief interest, "that Ferol ain't much like her folks. Reckon she must have some good blood somewhere but it's mighty far back. Her pa says she gets her red hair an' her grit straight from the red sand of the Colorado river bottom. She sure has got the grit. Goin' off to marry some strange man! She won't tell me his name neither. She says I know him, but I can't place him somehow. Lots a people come an' go every winter in this town.

An' why don't he come out here an' get her instead uh her goin' to him in New York? Seems to me there's somethin' funny about that. I declare she tells so many funny things I don't know what to believe. Maybe she ain't goin' to New York at all. I've been readin' these New York papers of yours, Mrs. Hill, and with all this talk about white slavin', I don't like the looks of things. Looks like it takes a smart woman to make the biggest mistake."

Mrs. Tarver rose slowly and reluctantly. Tom Tarver was downstairs waiting for her to fix his dinner, a privilege reserved for her alone. There was a basket to be filled to send out to her youngest son's farm,—a cake, fried chicken, some fresh bread—young Tom's wife wasn't much account. Some ironing to do, too,—a lot of doilies and napkins used at a married daughter's party a few days before. Nobody could do them up like Mamma. Last, but not least, Mrs. Tarver was to have the especial pleasure of keeping five grandchildren as usual this afternoon, so that her two daughters could get a little rest. Mrs. Tarver's blessed privilege consisted not only in serving Tom Tarver and the boarders, but many others. This she did cheerfully if not always efficiently. Her sympathies were broad and her kind heart included even such strays as Ferol Rankin and the female cat, which everybody else wanted to kick out. In such instances Mrs. Tarver was firm,

holding out against her entire family of three generations.

She gathered together the dishes on the tray with deliberate movement. She went back to the stove and had a look in to be sure the fire would continue to burn. She cast an appraising glance upon the woodbox and made a mental note to tell that nigger to carry some wood up to Mrs. Hill's room. And then, lifting the tray, Mrs. Tarver said what had been uppermost in her mind all the while.

"She showed me a roll of bills he sent her, this mornin'. She's bought herself a new suit case, an' her old suit's come from the tailor's all clean an' pressed. She's full old to marry. I know that, Mrs. Hill. But I'm so worried about that girl, I can hardly see. I've talked to her until I'm blue in the face. She says she's goin' on that midnight train to-night to Fort Worth. I want you to talk to her once more, Mrs. Hill. She'll listen to you. She admires you mightily. She told me one day she meant to study until she could talk like you an' have nice gentle manners like you. She knows you've travelled everywhere an' had all the chances she'd like to have. She's smart enough to know she can learn from you." Mrs. Tarver's voice dropped to a distressed whisper as she continued from the neighbourhood of the door.

"What if this man wants to get hold of her for

somethin' bad! Maybe he wants to sell her like that girl I was readin' about. Ain't we boun' to be responsible? The Bible teaches we should love our neighbour as ourselves. Don't that mean we got a take care of a girl in our own house?"

Tom Tarver's querulous voice lifted from below stairs. A baby was fretting. Somebody had rung the bell repeatedly but was still standing unanswered at the front door. Mrs. Tarver went slowly out with the tray.

CHAPTER III

IT was nearly seven o'clock in the evening before Ferol came in, skimming up the stairs with her accustomed bird-like flight. She moved about in her room for a while, then came into the hall and approached Mrs. Hill's bedroom door somewhat timidly. She entered vivid with a sort of excitement running through her veins. Her soft red locks clung to the moist forehead. She had been hurrying. Her lips were scarlet and smiling. Some object was clasped carelessly in one small hand. She stood before Mrs. Hill looking down at her brightly.

"I've got a little twenty-two," she said.

Mrs. Hill did not understand.

Ferol dropped a small revolver into the woman's lap. It looked like a toy. Mrs. Hill picked it up gingerly. It was loaded. The girl laughed at the older woman's timidity,—a musical ripple like a thrush's song.

"It's on safety," Ferol said, reassuringly. Taking the toy up, she swung it around in her hands.

"Do all Texas girls own revolvers?" asked Mrs. Hill dryly.

Ferol laughed aloud like a boy. "I reckon," she admitted, "—or a gun. I'd rather hunt than do anything else. I've got a coat at home made of fox skins. I shot 'em and fixed the skins myself. Last year my kid brother an' me killed a deer. Both of us shot at the same time. It was the wrong time of the year, so we couldn't tell we'd killed it. I wore overalls until I was twelve."

"How old are you now?"

"Seventeen. My mother was married when she was fourteen and she's had nine children. There are three younger than the kid, and I have two big brothers alive, but we don't know what's become of them. They went away."

Mrs. Hill saw her chance. "And now you want to go away without a word, as they did. What if you go to this man in New York and he refuses to marry you? I know you don't think that possible, but what would you do in that case?"

"He'll never refuse," answered Ferol. "He loves me. I know that man."

Mrs. Hill paused before the girl's colossal assurance. She might be right. Some instinct in her like that of the wild things might be a truer guide than the advice of the worldly wise. Still Mrs. Hill persisted. She took up a New York paper from the table.

"I've just been reading of a case like yours," she said, "—a girl as sure of herself and the man as you are. She went to him in New York. A

month later he sold her for two thousand dollars."

Ferol understood. She smiled complacently. "I've got the gun," she said, "and I've got some money. You mustn't think I'm broke."

"You child!" exclaimed Mrs. Hill, cold in the depths of her soul. "Do you think you could keep that revolver or any money where a man couldn't force them from you?"

"But he wouldn't do it!" Ferol protested. "You don't know how much power I have over that man!"

Mrs. Hill took a different tack. "Suppose you shoot him and get yourself into the newspapers, in prison perhaps. What would become of your mother then?"

The girl did not hesitate for an answer. She had thought of this too. "She'll never know. Dad an' the kid would have to rustle, that's all. Nobody'll ever know my name after I leave here. And if anybody ever told her why I'd married, I'd kill 'em," she said tensely.

Mrs. Hill caught her breath for an instant. She felt the nearness of what was inexplicable in the girl's conduct. Ferol continued to speak in a half-stifled tone.

"I've been good to my mother. I work hard. I only eat two meals a day. I ain't got any clothes. This suit and two shirtwaists an' an old skirt are all I own. I have to wash out my underclothes at

night. You don't know the stress laid on me! I can't get money enough!"

"So it's money," exclaimed Mrs. Hill. "You've made up your mind to go to him whether he marries you or not. You want money so much that you are willing to run any risk."

"Yes,—for my mother," Ferol admitted. She was very stern now. All the vivid colour had ebbed from her lips and cheeks. Her mouth was hard.

"Do you think your mother would be willing to accept the sacrifice you are making for her?" queried the older woman.

The girl's throat quivered. "She'll never know," she protested. "I got a letter from her this morning. She said they'd bought a cow. She wanted me to send money for feed. You don't know everything!"

"Where do they expect you to get the money?" exclaimed Mrs. Hill.

Ferol gazed at the older woman almost pityingly. "They know I'll rustle it," she said simply.

"So you can't give your family all the money they want, and you are mad enough and ignorant enough to think any man after he is married to you will be willing to support that big family!"

"That's not the only reason I'm marrying," admitted Ferol, goaded to the truth. Mrs. Hill probed deeper.

"So—you have to marry."

"No, I don't. I know what you mean. It's not that."

Mrs. Hill looked at her fixedly. "I don't believe you," she said.

The girl crimsoned, a wave of colour surging brightly up to the roots of her hair. She hesitated, then spoke in a voice deadened and remote. "I mean I haven't got to marry," she persisted doggedly. Still she hesitated, then seemed to make up her mind.

"I'll tell you the truth. I told Mrs. Tarver an' she told me never to tell another livin' soul. I haven't got to marry him, but I never could marry anybody else," she asserted, her chin quivering. "I lived with him as his wife winter before last. My folks was in town—sick. I had to have money. He was crazy about me. He couldn't get a divorce right off but he began to try. He promised he'd marry me jus' as soon as he got it. He's kept his promise. I didn't love him but I did love my mother. I had to have money. My mother an' I'd rather die than take charity. That night after my mother cried and put her arms around my neck I made up my mind. After the night school, I went over to his tent house. It was on the other side of the river. I went over there to him. I went almost every night for an hour or two. My folks thought I was at night school. He was good to me. He's a gentleman. My mother'd a

died if it hadn't been for me last winter." She stopped, choked with emotion.

"Perhaps she'd rather have died," said Mrs. Hill sternly.

Ferol protested. "I couldn't let her die. Not while I could get the money!" In her own mind the girl viewed her position as impregnable.

"But the man's wife!" exclaimed Mrs. Hill.

"She was only a cheap actress he'd married when he was drunk. He'd been fast. He told me the truth. He was bound to get rid of her anyhow. That's what he come west for!"

Crushed and weary, Mrs. Hill gave up the struggle. She did not utter platitudes. She offered the girl a chance.

"If you want to get out of this marriage even now," she said earnestly, "I'll help you. I'll get you to some other place. I'll let you have the money to make a fresh start. You miss your free life on the farm, your riding, your hunts?"

The girl's eyes became like two shining stars. "I reckon I do," she said breathlessly.

"Then I'll send you to a ranch I know of. You can teach two little children to pay for your board. You will have time to study, books to read. You can learn by keeping ahead of the children in their school books. They may pay you a small salary. You could save most of it, or send it to your mother. It will not be a case of charity."

But Ferol shook her head regretfully. "No

use," she said; "he'll hound me until I marry him. He'll follow me wherever I go. He'll never give me up. He says that an' I know he means it!"

"And Milt Foster?" asked Mrs. Hill.

"Milt don't love me as much as he thinks he does." Ferol's voice grew tender and a brooding smile quivered upon her lips. Then she grew suddenly stern.

"I couldn't marry him anyhow. Him nor anybody else. It wouldn't be right. Not after what I've done." She got up resolutely and assumed a bright smile.

"I'm fond of Milt," she said humorously, "but I reckon I c'n live without him."

Mrs. Hill put out her hands and took the two small firmer ones. The girl's grip was strong. Mrs. Hill put a hand on her arm. It was like a steel cable, a solid coil of strength. "If you need help, call on me," she said, more conscious of her own physical weakness than ever before in her whole life.

"Thank you, ma'am," answered Ferol, "I'll come through." Mrs. Hill had a momentary, reassuring intuition that this girl would land on her feet wherever she went, but at what cost she could not surmise. The mixture of false pride and ignorance, of sentimentality and common sense, was a strange budget for life's demands.

Ferol went out, closing the door softly behind. Mrs. Hill heard her moving about in her room.

Presently Milt Foster came. They sat on the upper gallery near Mrs. Hill's window, talking in low voices. She could not hear what was said, but every once in a while Ferol cleared her throat, and once, when she answered a call from Mrs. Tarver at the foot of the stairs, her voice was husky. Mrs. Hill guessed that she had been weeping.

A little later the young man went away. Ferol went into her room and locked the door. Mrs. Hill heard her strike a match. Followed the roar of burning things in the stove.

A cab drove up to the gate and the man called the house after the lazy custom of the community. Ferol went to the window and spoke to him in that low, penetrating voice. "Coming directly," she said.

In a moment she went down the stairs and Mrs. Tarver was speaking to her kindly at the door. Almost at once the cab door slammed and the horses started off. She was gone.

CHAPTER IV

FROM the foul air of the chair car where she had frugally spent the night, Ferol stepped down into the smoke-saturated atmosphere of the Union Depot in Kansas City. Ferol had lied about her place of meeting with Berry. She had thought it necessary. Ferol lied when the occasion demanded. Her code for lying was as peculiar as her moral obliquity. She rarely lied to her own people—only when she considered it for their own good. To others she might lie for self protection, with about as much idea of wrong doing as a mother bird in trailing an intruder away from her young. A lie successfully "put over" an outsider was an amusing joke in the Rankin family. If Ferol lied less than others of her class it was that her shrewd mind foresaw detection. Concealing her meeting place with Berry was the essence of self-preservation.

Berwin Ward was waiting for Ferol at the steps of the car. He had passed through the gates with no more formality than a curt nod. He was that kind of man. People made way for Berwin Ward; they fell back impressed by his air of consequence, his assured manner. Rules were for ordinary

persons who were unable to conceive of breaking them. Berry was not lacking in such conception; somehow, without effort, he always got through the lines.

With the same prescience he had known to find Ferol in the chair car, smiling to himself the while somewhat grimly at the thought of how soon such economies would pass into disuse for this little Texas girl; with what facility she would adapt herself to habits of luxury.

When the slight shabby figure of the girl stepped down beside him, Ward felt a momentary shock, a revulsion of the ardent longing of preceding hours. She was so thin, so meagrely clothed. Ferol looked at him with hard eyes. Warnings, entreaties, wise saws passed through the girl's mind, but not fear. She watched for his first move, for a clue to their mutual standing. As she put her hand almost unconsciously into his, she felt the sudden response in his fingers; it leaped to his eyes. With one arm about the girl's shoulders, Berry drew her close and kissed her full upon the mouth. The moment of reaction was passed, and again he was confident, eager. He noticed the quick colour surge into her cheeks in response to his kiss. A flash of exultation carried him along smiling at her side, his arm linked in hers, his eyes bent upon her glowing face. With the desire which she awakened in every fibre of him, came the thrill of possession. She was his,

his. He did not speak for fear this sensation might pass. He scanned her like a poem, the glowing cheek so near him, the curling tender lips, the reddish delicate eyelashes drooped low, certain blue veins which he knew and sought in her bare throat. He pressed her arm close to his side as they walked along through the crowd, and she looked up at him, revealing grey limpid eyes, wide-pupilled. Ferol did not smile, but her lips softly parted and her chin quivered.

When they were safely sheltered in the taxicab and whirling through the smutty, dingy streets, Berry gave her a huge bear hug which made her laugh. She put out a protesting hand. "Wait," she said in that velvety, throaty tone which Berry loved, "I certainly must take a look at you. Reckon I don't know you in all these fine clothes."

Berry laughed with her. "You miss the old khakis, eh? Well, we are not in Texas now. Just wait until we get you a new outfit. You'll be such a grand lady that I shall not be able to find my Ladybird under all the pretty things." Then his voice growing grave, he added, "Ferol, did you get away all right? No trouble?"

She answered briefly, "Yes; the folks won't know till they get my letter. I wrote mamma the last thing."

"What did you say?"

She told him. Her note had been a very brief

farewell but with a distinct promise of help after her marriage.

"So you think there is no danger of your Dad turning up soon? Give us until afternoon and you will be tied to me so tight that it will take more than a man with a gun to get you away. Let them come then. I'd enjoy a little gun play myself, just by way of celebration."

"He'll not come," answered Ferol, from certain knowledge of her parent's deliberation. She felt a momentary resentment against her Dad, but it was gone at once. Ferol could not harbour resentment long.

"He could wire the police here if he wanted to. You know your being under age gives him the right to hold us up. But he will have a long arm to catch us now. Breakfast, the license, and we have the trick."

Breakfast was celebrated gaily in the café of a smart hotel, gaily on the part of Berry Ward. Ferol sat very straight with the look that came into her face when she was riding over new and perilous ground. The onyx pillars of the café, the glare of cut glass, the soft-spoken, insistent waiters, confused and vexed her so that she grew more wary with every moment and left the place with the utmost relief, to go to a taxicab.

All thought of killing, suggested to Ferol by the fears of Mrs. Tarver and Mrs. Hill, had vanished from her mind. She had not been mistaken.

Berry was still determined to marry her; he still felt her power over him. At once the valiant thoughts had receded, leaving her fearful of something within herself. Was she so anxious after all to marry Berry Ward? Ferol's lips had become pale; her heart clutched persistently. She looked out of the windows of the taxi at the crowded streets, her spirit running, doubling, losing itself in the crowd, darting up an alley like a fox pursued. Suddenly she knew that she wanted to get away, to escape from Berry Ward. She put her hand upon the door handle; withdrew it as quickly.

Berry watched her closely, every nerve taut. Ferol observed this attention and sank back furtively, only to glance out of the car at the other side and to begin once more her imaginary dash for freedom. In the corridor of the courthouse Berry drew her to one side, his thin lips compressed in a bleak line. His eyes looked down into hers sternly. "You want to get away," he blurted out.

"Oh, Berry," she cried frantically, her hands at her throat, "I—must I——"

"Do you want to back out?" His blue eyes became suffused with red from countless tiny veins. He glared at her with helpless hands. His rage was so great that he wanted to do her some bodily injury. As he stood before her making a strong effort at self-control the girl suddenly

calmed. She had remembered. Without a word she expressed to him her determination to go on with the undertaking. She did not flinch again, but held her head high, like one proudly paying an old debt.

In the half hour that followed and which made her Berwin Ward's wife, Ferol thought of many things, like one drowning. She recalled scenes from her childhood; happy fishing days on the river; her mother teaching her a prayer; how the kid's cowlick had to be worked over before he went to church. Her mind leaped backward since it dared not look beyond.

Berry remained beside her mute, stern. He was just a little bit ashamed. He wished that he had said nobly, "You are free. You need not marry me unless you wish," and that she had turned to him with one of her flashes of tenderness to refuse his generosity. But would she have refused? Berry could take the risk with his imagination; perhaps he could leave it to her final decision upon reflection; but in the heart of him he dared not chance losing her—she was too precious to him. This consciousness of the hold Ferol had on him, of his weakness, made him grim.

In their suite at the hotel Berry left her and wandered out upon the streets, trying to conquer the mad desire to return and hold her fast in his arms. He walked hither and thither without

knowing where he was. The further he went from the hotel, the more determined he became to stay away; to give her this moment to use as she pleased, even if she choose to seize it to escape from him. She was legally his now. He had rights—which he forbore to use. As he walked aimlessly, Berry reviewed their past relationship —the chance which had brought them together.

A whim had taken him to Texas, out of the beaten health-seeker's track. Ordinarily he wintered in New Mexico or Colorado, in the high, cold places where the insidious disease which racked him might be kept in abeyance. Berwin Ward did not look like a sick man. He was exceedingly blonde with thin, wiry figure and ivory-tinged skin. He rarely coughed. Six years he had fought his ailment and held his own. He had made his winter pilgrimages; had camped and hunted and lived in the open. He had had his reward in months at home in New York or summers down on the coast of Maine.

Texas had offered the lure of the unknown. He had started to wander over its vast expanse until he should run into a climate which might answer his need. His unfortunate escapade in New York the preceding spring had the effect of making him fight shy of his usual haunts. He wanted to go where he was unknown; where he would be allowed to forget the wretched night of debauch which had tricked him into a chorus girl marriage

—a marriage which he repudiated with the dawn, but which threatened to draw him into serious legal complications. Berry rested his affairs gladly with the family lawyer and went straight to New Orleans, where he finished the episode with another wretched week of dissipation, from which he awoke gorged with disgust.

He fled to Galveston, drifted north; heard of good fishing on the Colorado River; finally found himself in the small town in west central Texas, where he saw Ferol Rankin. Berry glanced at her as she passed him on the street. He turned and followed her into the Racket Store where he made a trifling purchase from her.

That first meeting had established a sort of bond between them which he found serious enough actually to try to break. He fell in with a party of men who were going hunting, and absented himself during a week. When he came back, he went straight to the Racket Store. Ferol was there. She looked at him mockingly from behind a shower of cheap laces, as though she might know of his wakeful nights, his haunted, unlucky days. He had proved himself a surly companion and a poor hunter. His return to the town was welcomed as a relief by his party.

Berry had been obliged to go back. Driven by a passion which surprised and vexed him, he struggled to remain away from the girl. His last love adventure had been enough. He did not de-

sire further entanglements. No doubt the girl was ignorant and coarse, or worse—silly, a fool with a pretty face and yielding bosom. One talk with her outside of the store would cure him of this folly. The morning this thought occurred Berry returned to town.

Within a week he had walked home with Ferol from the store. An evening together at the moving picture show followed, when Berry tried to kiss her good-night at her own gate. Ferol left him tingling from a slap on the cheek. And from that moment the pursuit had begun. Berry acknowledged the madness with grim amusement to himself; finally it obsessed him.

He established himself for the winter in a tent house on the edge of town. Here he slept in the open, made himself a comfortable place to lounge and smoke and read, and tirelessly stalked his prey. At first she seemed to him fair game. She lured him with her rich voice, her quaint remarks —a sort of boyish daring which he took for invitation. But presently he got to know the girl, to understand her crude bravado and childish innocence. No girl born and bred on a west Texas farm or ranch could be said to have reached womanhood with complete innocence. Perhaps this might be said of farm life anywhere. Knowledge of life and its functions comes to a country girl in a natural way, which might be considered a greater protection than a city girl's guarded

ignorance. Knowing, yet with mind as clean as the windswept open spaces, Ferol offered a piquant lure to the world-weary Berry. From pursuit he achieved a tender desire to shelter her in his heart; to protect her from all that she knew not of; but always, savagely to possess her. Her imperfections and crudeness were an additional lure; she was so different from any other woman of his experience. The madness which beset him carried Berry far from his habitual course in life. Nothing could make him give her up. This fact once determined, Berry set about winning Ferol with his usual high hand and unbroken effrontery.

When he found that he could not provoke her tenderness save in swift, fleeting moments, Berry set himself to win her by methods scarcely within his code. Her poverty offered him unique opportunity. Her resistance, so firm at first, was finally beaten down by two established facts: her family's dire need of support and her own utter confidence in Berry's promise of marriage. Berry told Ferol the truth about his marriage and convinced her of subsequent negotiations leading to divorce. He showed her letters from his lawyer, his father even; allowed her to read his own in reply. Ferol herself frequently mailed these letters to the lawyer. She knew that the granting of the divorce was a matter of months. Sceptical and shrewd, she permitted herself to be convinced only in a businesslike, matter-of-fact way.

Even then Ferol used her wiles to create delay. But Berry, in her own vernacular, called her bluff. Dominated by the thought of her family's needs, and the consciousness of her own power through Berry forever to relieve her loved ones from financial stress, Ferol achieved the height of reasoning herself a heroine. She was accustomed to the domineering male and the subservient female. She was selling herself into a slavery which she believed was the common fate of women. In her own class the custom of body service for the men of the family was established, and what Ferol saw in the life of the better placed women in the small town had not given her any larger view of woman's place in the world. She accepted the theory that women were destined to labour and to serve men for the good of the family.

Ferol recognised in Berry one who had strange force and knowledge, yet she also was vitally aware that he did not come up to the standards of her own people. She would be marrying a divorced man, which was a disgrace in itself; and one who was not a Christian, since he did not belong to any church. And if these two were not enough, there was the further crime of his being a northerner, a Yank. To give herself up to one so below the standard of the community only could be balanced by the weight of her love and devotion to her own people. The consciousness of her heroism was indeed so complete as to as-

suage the practical common sense begotten in her character by some forgotten foresworn ancestor. Sentimentality swept her along.

Berry never had broken a promise to her. For this she respected him. In spite of her inheritance of prejudices, Ferol was enough child of the west, bred of the free soil, to recognise and to value honesty in others. Berry convinced her of his purpose less by words than by her own instinct, once the proofs of his integrity were hers. It was only in viewing herself that Ferol's myopic vision failed.

She was accustomed to the resort to gun play. She could foresee the possible necessity of killing herself in case any of her assurances failed. When Berry threatened to kill her if she would not come to him and marry him, Ferol believed. And in spite of the seeming absurdity, Berry believed it himself. Ferol was not afraid to die, but she recognised that her untimely death would destroy the very purpose and importance of her sacrifice, the reasons for which remained unchanged. Ferol had gone to marry Berry unhesitatingly.

Now she was his. She lay in the hollow of his hand to crush, to play with. Berry's heart and mind exulted. As he walked heedlessly along the streets he visioned himself buying pretty frocks for her, putting them on her. She should be dressed with art. He thought of her absurdly

small feet; how they would look in delicately tinted slippers. He intended to create in her an exquisite taste, a fine appreciation of the beautiful. He would educate her to conform to his own views, to answer his own needs. Intoxicated by these visions, Berry turned back toward the hotel. He hurried blindly.

CHAPTER V

FEROL sat a long while in a gorgeously upholstered chair, awaiting Berry's return. Idly restless, she went to the window and leaned, watching the crowds of hurrying people on the street below. They fascinated her. Where were they all going in such a hurry? She observed the women's frocks curiously and with attention to detail. There were no sunbonnets visible, but she was scarcely surprised. The men were so spick and span that she considered if it might be Sunday. Only for church or a funeral would a west Texas man give such attention to his wearables. The trim suits, crisp linen, clean-shaven faces drew her almost irresistibly. She longed to go down to the street and to look closer at these wonderful creatures. In Texas Berry had affected khakis, corduroys, rough tweeds. Outing clothes were not of recognised use in west Texas; the men often had ridiculed Berry, but behind his back. In her hearing they sneered openly, but they were careful that Berry should not be aware of their attitude. Anything new in town generally called forth sneers. It was the small town's only weapon of attack and was besides a rooted

custom. Sneers and ridicule for the stranger—that was west Texas.

At the station Berry's dazzling appearance had startled Ferol—made her for a moment less sure of herself. Now she saw that he was dressed like all the other men; he was not a dude after all. She wished Berry would come in and take her out on the streets. It did not occur to her to go out alone. Nor had she a thought of escape. The moment of panic had passed; she was ready to accept the new life and to put the old behind her. Ferol was not given to vague fears or vain imaginings. She was hungry.

Ferol moved restlessly about the suite. She found the white and silver bathroom, so beautiful with nickel and porcelain. She investigated the closets and bureau drawers and finally looked under the bed. This made her smile and suggested a use for the pile of soft rags she had found tucked remotely in a bureau drawer. She opened her cheap suit case and took out the revolver. She broke it and removed the cartridges. Contentedly and with care Ferol began to clean her gun.

She was engrossed with this occupation when Berry tapped at the door and came in quietly. She looked up at him, alert and smiling. The gun—Berry's heart skipped a beat, but his fear was dissipated by Ferol's smiling lips and shining eyes.

"Who are you going to kill?" he laughed at her.

"Reckon I'm goin' out an' kill me a bird," she flashed back at him, "I'm that hungry."

Berry looked at his watch. It was five o'clock; they had not eaten since breakfast. He fetched her hat, took the revolver from her hands and hurried her to the elevator. In the café of the hotel they dined. It was Ferol's first dining and one which she never forgot. Accustomed to dinner in the middle of the day and a meagre supper when luck was good, this long elaborate function seemed an unnecessary lengthening of the business of eating. Berry ordered cocktails. When the table finally assumed its normal attitude of immobility, and the brackish taste was gone from her tongue, Ferol spoke confidentially against cocktails. Berry laughed at her when the waiter's back was turned. He urged her to be a sport and watched her as she sipped her wine. At once Ferol conceived a passion for champagne.

"It makes your stomach feel like white velvet, doesn't it, Berry!" she exclaimed. The meal seemed endless to her. Berry prolonged it with true epicurean enjoyment of the food and of her. She was so pretty in her cocktail confusion, quiet still, but full of soft elisions of speech, and her lips were red and inviting. The food steadied her and the wine warmed her subtly into frank and foolish speech. She was confident that she

had recovered her balance and self-control, enjoyed her food enormously and waxed into a geniality that included the waiter. She ordered him about. When she observed that Berry was laughing at her, not with her, Ferol covertly ceased to sip the wine and let her unusual loquacity divert Berry from noticing. Berry made her drink the small black coffee, which was so bitter, but the mouldy cheese she steadfastly refused to eat. She glanced about over the table, then toward the lurking waiter.

"What do you want?" questioned Berry, resting his elbows on the table and slipping one hand over hers, under cover of his arm.

"Toothpick," answered Ferol, withdrawing her hand warily. Berry threw back his head and laughed heartily though without a sound. Ferol watched him, fascinated by this discovery.

"Only in Texas," he whispered confidentially, trying to recover her hand.

"Don't they have 'em up here?" she asked.

Berry laughed, then seeing that she was about to ask the waiter, he pinched her arm and demanded the bill. When the man had gone to the cashier, Berry explained to her very gently that she must never use a toothpick except in the privacy of her bathroom. Ferol thought at first that he was joking. She flushed brightly when he had made her understand the breach of good breeding, and went out of the dining room with head up and

cheeks flying the signal of her embarrassment.

At dinner they had planned an evening at the theatre. In their sitting room Berry teased Ferol to smoke a cigarette, then accused her of having smoked before when he saw that it caused her no discomfort. He pulled her down into his lap and took all the hairpins out of her hair. He teased and pinched and caressed her until he made her flare up in anger.

They went down in the elevator without speaking, and out along the street to the theatre. As they slipped into their seats in a box, the house was suddenly darkened and the curtain went up on the first scene in *Romeo and Juliet.*

From first act to the last Ferol sat spellbound. Her familiarity with picture shows and cheap, coarse vaudeville had not prepared her for such an artistic performance as this. When Miss Marlowe as Juliet played her pretty scene with the old nurse, Ferol's throat throbbed, and she realised a lack—a girlishness which she had never known. The meeting with Romeo was like her own romantic beginning with Berry, and she followed the swift wooing and espousal, seeing herself and Berry represented by Miss Marlowe and Mr. Sothern. Juliet's passionate love marked a divergence in her own case. Ferol wondered how it would feel to love Berry in that way. The tragic ending came upon her like an impending fatality. Would this be her end and

Berry's? She thought of her threats, uttered to Mrs. Hill; of her gun, lying disjointed on the table. A certain distaste for her own paltry love affair and marriage flooded Ferol's consciousness. She could not imagine Berry killing himself if he found her dead. She could vision him using the gun on her, or herself driven to killing him, but never this dual desire for self-destruction of the bereaved lovers. She came out of the theatre disillusioned with life, disappointed that her own romance was over and done with, falling so short of this ideal love tale.

The play had bored Berry. Had he been alone, he would have left the theatre after the farewell in the dawn. Ferol's absorption in the play ruffled him at first but became a diversion. What a child she was, Berry considered; how naïve and confident in her ignorance! What was it in her that drew him so? There was a hard side to Ferol's nature; Berry had played on that. The tenderness which came so rarely made him catch his breath. It foretold such gracious possibilities. Berry wished to win Ferol's love as well as her respect. He told himself that he would be patient until he had awakened in her a responsive tenderness. She was adorable, even in her coldness, but what would she not be to him in the strength of her passion! Quick to answer to his need of her, Ferol gave Berry a tender affection—it was all she had.

As they went into their suite, Berry locked the door and walked away from her. She looked at him shyly.

"Berry," she said, "did Romeo and Juliet ever really live? Do you reckon anybody ever loved like that?"

Berry remained for a moment turned away from her that she might not see the boyish trembling of his lips. He came toward her, gently laying his hands on her shoulders. "Don't you love me in that way?" he asked, cursing himself the while for asking. He knew Ferol did not love him. Berry did not want her to lie.

Ferol looked down at his tie pin. Her fingers clutched the lapel of his coat. "I reckon not," she said, so low that he could scarcely hear her.

"Look at me, Ferol," he said.

She looked up into his eyes, showing tears in her own. Berry had never seen Ferol weep. "Do I fail you in any way, Ferol? Don't you think that I love you?" Her chin quivered.

"Aren't you going to give me something in return?" he asked. He saw her lips harden.

"I don't mean——" protested Berry, "I mean——" He stopped. He could not make her understand the depths and fulness of his meaning.

Berry turned away to the table, took out his bill book and handed Ferol a small roll of bills. "This is for your mother," he said. "To-mor-

row I shall write to my lawyer to send her that amount at the beginning of each month. You will never have to ask me or to remind me. It will go on until I die. Then you will have enough to arrange about your family as you please. You have never asked me about my income, Ferol. About how much I have—well, I have plenty, more than enough for all that we shall ever want to spend, though I suspect you will be a good spender when you learn how. You will have your own monthly allowance. If you choose to send your people more, you may, but my advice is, to go slow. That amount is enough to make them comfortable. More might ruin the kid. Tell your mother to write to you if there is some especial need of more, but I shouldn't allow her to think that you had an unlimited source. I leave this to your own good sense and knowledge of their limitations."

Ferol looked at him yearningly, her gratitude in her eyes. "Oh, Berry," she said earnestly, "why are you so good to me?"

Berry took her small hand and brushed it slowly against his cheek. "Because I love you," he said. His reply almost revealed a sob.

CHAPTER VI

FOLLOWED days of intoxication—Berry with spending and Ferol with receiving. Dainty frocks, delicate silken robes, fine linens; imagination had never carried Ferol to such beauty in dress. Days were when she believed it possible to love any man capable of such generosity. She became drunk with luxury. A strand of pearls caused her to throw herself in Berry's arms with mad delight. She became for the moment a wonderful actress, almost convincing herself that this stimulated passion was real. She gave of herself in return for jewels and dress because she thought it was expected of her; she did not know how else to give or to get. She was hampered by new conditions, yet unable to change them. Their relations remained that of man and mistress because she did not understand how to adjust them upon a new and firmer basis. Days of reaction would be spent in shopping alone, buying more clothes, for which her strange little conscience made her pay.

Berry revealed to Ferol a colour world unguessed. He taught her the value for herself of the greens and browns of the woods, which brought

out the bright tints in her hair. The good taste which had caused her to avoid frills and always to clothe herself simply stood her in good stead. It restrained her from extreme styles and vulgar display.

In the course of these exciting days Ferol gave small thought to those she had left behind. A flash of homesickness now and then, a poignant longing for the adoration of the kid, the faith of the mother pierced her heart and was gone. She wrote to her mother, giving the New York lawyer's address for replies. She made it clear to her darling Midges that she was married, happy and able to give permanent assistance to the family fortunes. To Mrs. Tarver Ferol wrote more briefly: "I'm married. It's all right. Goodbye and God bless you." The letter contained a clipping from a newspaper, a list of marriage licenses issued; Ferol Rankin, aged 18, was given. The name of the man was carefully cut from the clipping; his age was stated as 35.

The city represented to Ferol a wonder world. She delighted in driving along the boulevards; so clean the streets, so substantial the stone and brick houses after the frame houses and dust-filled streets of her experience. The city was like the men and women who lived in it, wonderfully clean and well-kept.

The Cliff Drive was her favourite haunt. Ferol would get out of the car, climb to some rocky

point, and sit for hours looking out upon the river, that great crawling yellow snake which curved itself on out of sight. They found the woods, she and Berry, and tramped them hand in hand. They were comrades then, children, in their delight of the open. Unexpected glimpses of maidenhair ferns in a cleft of the rocks; violets—how they thrilled her with the joy of discovery after her own meagre west Texas woods!

Perhaps it was this anticipation of giving Ferol certain pleasure that caused Berry to conceive of a summer camp in California. It may have been a shower too much—Berry did not enjoy rainy days. At any rate they were whisked away on the thundering limited and before she quite knew what had happened, Ferol found herself in mountain land. Mountains: they were wonderful. Just at first and at a distance they were disappointing, but later in the high keen air she caught their impalpable charm.

Established in a vast hotel in San Francisco, Ferol discovered for herself the charm of the place, the especial lure of this city's streets. People were not in such a hurry here. There was plenty of time to stop to gaze into the beautiful windows of the shops, to linger over the matter of buying flowers in front of the Chronicle building, to pause near the famous Lotta fountain. Ferol found unexpected friendliness. The women looked at her with as much interest and as frankly

as Texans would have, and the men—well—the men all met her gaze more than half way. Ferol never had seen so many attractive men; men whose glance followed her with frank approving eyes.

The Wards drove through wonderful Golden Gate Park; lunched at Tait's, at Coppa's; wandered through Chinatown. A dinner at Cliff House was a supreme delight. Ferol sat in front of a broad window facing the sea, and while they ate the big red ball of fire, which was the sun, slipped down out of sight beyond Seal Rocks. The dinner was excellent; the music seductive. A zither player brought his small table near and played for her dream tunes. They were but a rhythmic accompaniment to an already beautiful and harmonious scene. A pretty singer came near and made amorous eyes at Berry, but Ferol never knew. She watched the moon rise, spellbound, saturating her soul with the beauty which she had unconsciously craved. To break the spell, Berry proposed to go downstairs to watch the ragging. Stimulated by the beauty which she had absorbed, stirred by the provocative music, Ferol was on fire to dance.

"Oh, Berry, please!" she cried; "it is such a natural dance, I'm sure I can do it." They ragged, Ferol dancing like some forgotten dryad until Berry was exhausted. Whirling along the beach road back to town, watching the white-

tongued sea licking at the sand; bathed in the silver splendour of the moonlight; stung by the tang of salt on her lips, Ferol was in an ecstasy. She believed herself happy.

They went with a slumming party along the Barbary Coast. At the time this diversion was the smart thing for parties made up at the hotel—to begin at Cæsar's and go down the line. At first Ferol was amused and entertained. She could not see anything so terribly naughty nor yet especially attractive. Later on in the cheaper dance halls the adventure lost charm completely. In one huge ugly place she and Berry were for a while seated alone at a small table. Near by a group of young people were drinking. A slip of a girl rose from the group, made a mocking salute with a slender hand, and, walking lightly, humming a tune, disappeared in the crowd. The poise of the girl, her extreme youth and grace, a delicate beauty in her face, drew Ferol's attention. Berry shook his head as he looked after her.

"What is it?" questioned Ferol.

"Did you see that girl? Well, she belongs to the house. She will go off now and join another group of men and get them to buy drinks. She's young; hasn't been at it long, you can tell by her face. I dare say she is about your age, Ferol."

"What is the matter with her?" persisted Ferol.

"Same old thing. Nice girl; good family, no doubt," answered Berry, "but she got in with the wrong man; got to drinking perhaps, maybe drugged; but lost her head somehow, and had to drop out. She has a room somewhere in the neighbourhood where she takes the men."

Ferol shuddered. She was sick of the place. She wanted to go back to the hotel. As they walked along the street, one of the party called out, "We must go in here; they are dancing the Texas Tommy."

This proved to be the worst place yet, one run by negroes. The dance was not like anything Ferol had ever seen in Texas, but the dancers were agile and the dance really difficult. As Ferol sat looking about her she saw on the long bench which ran around the room against the wall, a fat negro woman of middle age. On either side of her was a white soldier in army khaki. Each had an arm about the woman's shoulders. Without a word Ferol fled the place, and Berry after her. Past the negro barker at the door, out on the sidewalk, she pushed and hurried through the crowd. When they had reached an open space, Berry saw that she was white, trembling, her eyes blazing in anger.

"Why did you take me to such a place?" she cried, "that negro woman—those soldiers!" All her life Ferol had seen negroes, watched them dance, laughed at their antics; but she had not

yet seen them placed on the level with the poorest white of the south. She felt herself outraged. This ended their adventuring into by-paths. Ferol had small taste for slumming.

Into this new world of sensation, of poetry and pleasure, Ferol drifted with senses alert, intelligence keen. From a life of hard work in unattractive surroundings she had been removed abruptly to a land where pleasure existed as a pastime, beauty as a necessity. Small wonder that she was frequently bewildered, not always sure of herself and sometimes uncertain of Berry. Berry had black moods, whose cause she could not fathom; times when she knew him displeased with her, annoyed and angry. These moods were not caused by the small gaucheries which so greatly embarrassed Ferol; awkward mistakes which never ceased to amuse Berry while she eventually exacted from him the promise always to put her right. So quickly did she learn to imitate Berry's fastidious habits and to master certain small expressions of speech, that those occasions were infrequent. But the black moods remained a habit. Berry was not happy. He adored Ferol. She held for him all that was precious in life, and which he felt slipping away from him—youth, vigour, beauty. Her originality provoked and charmed his jaded interest. Berry was capable of loving Ferol divinely, but the soul of his passion still escaped him. Instead of gaining Ferol's

confidence in their mutual life, by kindness and consideration, Berry was affectionate one day and sneering the next. He remained a master instead of a friend, using the lash of his bitter tongue when scourged by the despair of winning Ferol's love.

Berwin Ward was a man of taste and refinement. His people, his college, his experiences, all tended to the highest plane of American life. When he had finished Harvard Law School, Berry had gone abroad, wandered over the world, affiliating with the best. He had not wasted himself in dissipation, nor yet remained a Puritan in his habits of life. Up to the time of his failing health, Berwin Ward had led a fairly decent and useful life.

Sickness had come upon him the year after he had assumed the management of his own property in New York—an insidious torment which had lurked, waiting its chance to fasten itself upon him. Berry was not the first of his family to encounter the enemy, but none could have met it with greater determination to fight and win. He left his affairs to the control of others, abandoned himself completely to the cure at Saranac; made his arrest, and returned at the end of a year, clear-eyed and confident that he had won. It was only the beginning.

Winters followed, of breaking down and building up; seasons of Davos Platz; months on the

American desert. It had come to stay, this monster, and Berry had learned to live with it, since he could not be rid of it. He had found what he could do; how long he dared to stay in New York and when he might venture to return. The hunts and spartan living of the winters gave him strength and hardihood. He developed an enormous resistance, though still subject to recurrent acute attacks.

The struggle had not been without its effect upon Berry's character—its blight upon his disposition. A certain bitter determination to get what he could out of life; he had not long to live —let it be a quick dance and a merry one. This reasoning had distorted his view of life. It led him into rash adventurings; heedless experiences which took their toll of his convictions and left him small faith.

And now the wife whom he loved eluded his hungering heart; active life, a home in New York, children—beyond his reach, he well knew. Days when he cursed himself for still living were followed by days when his joy in this young, unspoiled creature by his side gave Berry complete content; when he counted himself lucky still to be alive. He was very gentle with Ferol at such times, talking to her of his mother, his sister, friends at home. Ferol was always interested. With unconscious tact she drew him on to speak of his boyhood, then matched the tales with her

own unusual experiences. Life was very full for Ferol. She emerged from her cocoon stage with a wonderful fitness for the joy of living. There was so much to be learned! She was on the borderland of an enticing country, which held itself waiting to be discovered by her. Books, theatres, pictures, people—all yielded themselves to her devouring intelligence. Berry's growing bitterness was brushed aside.

To throw off the restless moodiness which threatened to engulf him, Berry took up the deferred plan of a camp in the high sierra. Drenching summer fogs hastened the preparations. By the middle of July they were off for the high country, Ferol eager and alive as a young bird.

CHAPTER VII

IN the still dry dawn of the hot valley the stage coach stopped at the hotel. Ferol had the front seat of honour beside the driver, while Berry sat close behind her in the body of the hack. All day they drove, mounting steadily the steep rock-bound roads, past the toll gate, along the perilous ledges, through fragrant, plumy forests, six horses plunging ahead with the long, cracking whip occasionally singing over their ears. With every change of horses Ferol's joy increased. The interested stage driver, soon aware, was young enough to risk putting the reins into the hands of such a pretty young lady. She had her first lesson in coach driving, to the dismay of several anxious passengers. They came to halt at a sawmill postoffice at sunset. The guide was waiting with two saddled horses and a wagon team. Ferol and Berry were off on horseback through the scented woods, following the trail, while the guide came on at a slower gait with their luggage in the wagon. In the depths of the forest, near the edge of a lake, they came upon the camp; cabin of logs, a great fire burning before it, surrounded by tall fir trees, whose upper

shadowy foliage disappeared high above, in the darkness of the night; trees so thick that Berry and Ferol together with arms outstretched could not reach around one.

Near the camp fire were lounging chairs, stools, an army cot or two. The dining room was a boarded platform, roofed over with a thatch of fragrant green fir boughs. The cook stove was placed between two great trees; a shelter had been built to windward; a rude table stood close by. Within the cabin was a bare, great room, hung with skins of wild animals, saddles, bridles, guns, supplies; a few chairs and a big table furnished the room. Added on with a careless slapdash of boards from the mill was a bedroom, floored, walled, but without a roof. Rain was not to be expected at this time of the year. Two beds, an old weather-beaten bureau and washstand were the furnishings. That night, for the first time in her life, Ferol slept roofless, under the stars. She had lived in as rough a shack, with leaking roof; never with such comfort of palatable, nourishing food, clean, springy bed.

The guide cooked, cared for the horses and was at their disposal for fishing. He was silent and handy, without enthusiasm save when fishing. Then his eyes would glisten; he would chew vigorously some sort of gum which he habitually carried in his mouth. And the fishing was excellent. Trolling on the lake, whipping the small

streams; results were satisfactory. Accustomed to the small perch and lesser game fish of her southern country, Ferol found rainbow trout and steel heads fascinating beyond her dreams. Like a true Texan, she never wearied of the sport. If necessary she could sit for hours in patient struggle with a wise and wily old fellow, matching his own wariness. The pull on the line from her first big trout, the whirr of the reel—what excitement! With a quick jerk of the rod Ferol lifted the fish an instant from the water. The reel sang like a siren whistle as the trout made for the centre of the lake, steady and strong as though bent on drawing the boat after him. When she had mastered the trick of the reel, and had brought the still struggling fish to the side of the boat, she landed it awkwardly enough, then promptly yelled for joy. She danced up and down in her excitement, almost upsetting the boat, sending forth joyous whoops, which let off the accumulated steam of many nerve-racking days.

The active free life of her childhood had come again. Ferol welcomed it with open arms at dawn. By night she was ready for bed with the birds, and had to be coaxed to sit by the camp fire under the vast, unreal trees. After a month of this life, Ferol was hard-muscled and sinewy, clear-eyed and strong.

And Berry suffered less from moods, though he often wearied of the fishing sooner than Ferol.

Only once during the first happy weeks in the high sierra did Ferol feel the touch of the adverse fate which had helped to mould her. Berry had one of his periodic attacks; slight, soon checked, yet requiring care, a certain amount of watchfulness. Ferol's first instinct, it must be confessed, had been to run from Berry in distaste, horror; but loyalty asserted its power and she took upon herself bravely this first real burden of her married life. Berry soon recovered. For days he lay flat on a cot under the deep shade of the fir trees, reading newspapers and magazines, while Ferol spent the time trolling on the lake within call, the man at the oars.

As Berry grew stronger, Ferol would wander off into the depths of the forest, discover beautiful mountain meadows bright with wildflowers, among them her own home Blue Bonnets and Indian Pinks. She came back to camp with arms filled, ferns, brakes, flowers; she had huge lard cans filled with them on every hand. Ferol did not know fear in the woods, killing a snake with more calmness than most girls would show in stepping on a spider. She found rocky creeks penetrating into the depths of tangled wilds; rock-bound canyons in miniature; caves to explore. She would sit perfectly still in the forest while the wild things came close. The quail ran about in piping flocks, the anxious, crested parent running up and down upon a log close by, curious,

half confident. The squirrels threw nuts at her and scolded until they came close and found her as harmless as a bush or tree.

On a certain high rock, flat-topped, overlooking an open burned stretch to the lake edge, now green with new undergrowth, Ferol would lie on a carpet of pine needles, in the sun, dreaming, listening to the singing of the pines, watching for Berry to come under the tall leaning tree by the lake below, to signal her to come down.

They made day tramps, carrying luncheon in knapsacks, returning home footsore and weary; eating and sleeping like children. The day came when Berry thought himself strong enough to make the excursion down Devil's Slide, a drop of a thousand feet, according to the guide. The descent was perilous along the steep mountain side, clinging to trees, stumbling knee-deep in rotted pine needles; but the ascent was the work of hours, clinging to rocky crevices, pulling each other up in turn by sheer arm strength, stopping exhausted to recover breath. Other walks took them far through the forest, along the slanting steep side of the mountain, where no trails were to be found and the sound of gurgling waters babbled to them from far below; mighty cliffs were glimpsed through the trees across the canyon. Occasionally the reward was a view of a waterfall streaming its shining folds like a banner in the sunshine miles away.

During these days Ferol had time to pause; to take stock of her new life and to consider its meaning. High up on the flat rock she lay for hours on her back, staring up into the infinite blue as though seeking to pierce the mystery of life. And the thought which came forth most persistently from the cells of her brain was of that girl in the dance hall on the Barbary Coast. Strangely enough it recurred again and again, the image of this girl, her gesture inviting study. She intruded upon more pleasant thoughts until reluctantly Ferol began to reflect upon her. Ferol did not at first connect the girl's experience in any way with her own, but gradually this phase of the matter presented itself. Some such experience as her own had put that girl into such hideous surroundings; cast her out of her own into that ugly place. A man had left her to this fate. If Berry had left her, what would have become of her? She was caught up by this frightful possibility. In spite of the anxiety of Mrs. Tarver and Mrs. Hill, such a fate had never seemed really possible to her, until now. Ferol had been so sure of Berry. But why? Ferol's shrewd mind began to work. She knew nothing of analysis; introspection had been a closed book to her. Experiences with Ferol had ended with the acts themselves, and with the hardihood of her pioneer blood she had put such incidents be-

hind her hastily and had gone on her way toward fresh experiences.

Now Ferol was confronted with after effects. Berry had not left her. She resented the implied comparison, yet was arrested by its truth. For the first time in her life Ferol viewed herself in an unfavourable light. The crust of her conceit was broken. This girl might have given herself for love. She herself had sold what was hers for money; for her mother, it was true, but—— Ferol knew that she did not love Berry. This tender gentle feeling which she had for him warm in her heart, fitful—it was true, the feeling slipped away from her at times and left her resentful to Berry's presence in her life. She shrank from this insidious suggestive vision of herself, flung it from her in fierce denial. She had been right, she argued to herself hotly. For herself, it was the thing to do; there had been no other way out. Proudly, angrily, Ferol said over and over again to herself, "I did it. It was right." This was her first intelligence of her sin.

Why had Berry married her? Why had he bothered to give her his name and to share his wealth with her? Why was he so kind to her? Love. Love was everywhere but in her. Yet she loved her mother. How she treasured the few precious letters which had come through the lawyer in New York. Her dear mother; the kid; right now she could stand by and see Berry de-

stroyed if need be, for her mother; Berry, who was so kind to her, to them all. Ferol drew back from this picture of herself with distaste. Faintly she began to see Berry as a human being; a man, quite detached from his usefulness to herself. He had had everything, yet he had picked her up, poor wretched waif she saw herself to be at last.

Was he then as mad about her as she believed? And why? Ferol slipped down from the rocky height and returned with lagging feet to the camp. Berry was lying flat as usual, absorbed in a book. He did not look up or notice her coming. Ferol sat down near him and looked at him, her eyes gifted with new sight.

Berry was slender and less tall than he looked. He had a narrow, lean face with high forehead, from which his straight bristling hair was trained up in a brush. His pale blue eyes were round and somewhat deep-set under heavy arches of bone. His nose was high, Roman arch suggested but not carried to its purest form. His thin red lips narrowed into a red line when he sneered. High-bred and distinguished, Berry Ward's appearance made a certain impression upon Ferol in spite of the different standard of manly beauty to which she was accustomed. "A broken-down sport" her fellow townsmen had called Berry. All eastern men who came out for their health were explained in that way. West Texas had little

toleration for health-seekers, especially wealthy young men, who were envied and whom the Texans affected to despise. Berry had ignored the townsmen for the greater part and had gone on his way. They did not like to be ignored. In marrying Berwin Ward, Ferol had really thought herself marrying beneath her. She had given herself to one looked upon with open scorn by her own kind—a tenderfoot. Milt Foster had criticised Berry to Ferol, not realising even that Ferol knew the man. And Milt Foster! With her new standards, this youth dwindled into insignificance. Ferol laughed aloud. Berry glanced up at her and smiled. "What's the joke?" he asked lazily, and continued reading.

Ferol went in to the mirror in the bedroom. She confronted herself in the glass with keen and critical eyes. Was it for her beauty that Berry had married her? Ferol stared at the rumpled curly hair. It was red, no denying that. She had seen beautiful women in San Francisco, many of them. Her own flawless skin had been matched on every side by complexions as wonderful; her colouring was no more vivid than theirs. Her mouth framed abrupt, crude speeches, which embarrassed her and made everybody laugh; it could not have beauty in Ferol's sight. She looked down at her meagre, thin form, as shapeless as a boy's under the khaki blouse. It was not for her tight little body that Berry loved her. Plainly,

Berry had not found beauty in her to love. And she was not clever and amusing like those gay young married women at the hotel who talked with Berry so lightly and amusingly in a language which she did not understand. Ferol had thought herself so smart. At home every one had told her so. Her Dad had called her "Brains" from the time when she was a tiny tot. She now confronted her plainness and stupidity and was appalled. Ferol partially fathomed her ignorance at this moment and was temporarily crushed beneath the bulk of it.

That night by the fire, cuddled in Berry's arms, she questioned him. "Berry, you promised I could study when we were married. You told me I could have a chance to learn something. I want to. I think I'd like to go to school."

Berry brushed his cheek against the fragrant velvet of her own so close. "Married women don't go to school," he protested.

"But, Berry, can't I get books and learn?"

"You are learning all the time. Anybody as naturally intelligent as you, Ladybird, doesn't have to go to school. Look around you and use your head."

Ferol could not tell him that she wanted to learn to talk like those clever, charming women at the hotel. She bit his cheek softly like a cat in play. "Bunch," she said, using her own pet name

for him, "you are not very smart for such a clever man."

"No, but I have a clever little wife," he returned, holding her hands tight, and breathing down into the front of her blouse. This tickled her and made her laugh and she wriggled out of Berry's grasp. They played like two puppies. It was always thus that their serious talks ended. For Berry she was a plaything. Apparently he was satisfied to have her remain just that.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was in October that Berry Ward ventured to New York with his young wife. In his father's house Ferol soon found herself at home. Henry Ward was a cultivated, charming gentleman of leisure, who found his son's wife unique and amusing, and, like his son, that was all that he expected, even desired, of her.

Not so limited, however, was Berry's mother. Mrs. Ward was a woman of many and complex interests. She was considered connoisseur in art and had a famous collection of valuable paintings, which gratified her slight taste for publicity. To be known as the possessor of certain masterpieces; to be sought as a patron of art and letters: these points of contact with the world at large Mrs. Ward did not find inimical to her sense of fitness and pride of place. Of a family long established in New York, married within her own limited circle of old families, Mrs. Ward had early proclaimed her refusal to be walled in socially. She knew the best of the writer folk and cultivated an acquaintance with painters who had arrived. She had the distinctive power to hold together a diverse and varied acquaintance so

that her home acquired merit through her skill of admixture and also a flavour which made it unique. As to the houses where she dined, Mrs. Ward cultivated a firm particularity which lent distinction to the dining list which held her name.

Berry was the great tenderness of Mrs. Ward's life. Her pride suffered through him. She loved her son quite simply and wholly. His marriages had been like separate knife thrusts in her heart. She recognised in Berry the domineering tendencies so needful of control in her own nature. She had watched these masterful traits, counteracting them with tact and persistence, so that as a lad Berry had promised well.

Berry's first marriage had come like an earthquake upheaval in the well-ordered and fastidious Ward household. His mother had not been without insight into the change which had taken place with Berry's illness and withdrawal from his normal life. With sinking heart she had watched the bitterness grow. She had not been able to reach him with tact or sympathy. Berry would not speak to her of his illness. After the first poignant fear of losing him had passed, Mrs. Ward had accepted the changed conditions as inevitable and to be endured. Berry's abandonment to the free and careless habits which had preceded his first wild marriage, scarcely had prepared Mrs. Ward for the culmination. Before this thrust at her pride and affection had been

passed over came the second blow—Berry had been divorced and remarried to a waif, a nobody in Texas.

For the first time Mrs. Ward turned to her daughter for sympathy and support. The mother had been always the dominant factor in the Ward home, yet gracefully and charmingly so, like a strong, delicate hand. The daughter had returned to the home of her girlhood, a widow. Agnes Trevor was young, intelligent and childless. In her mother's home as a girl Agnes had been scarcely noticed, overshadowed by her forceful mother. She now led her own life with quiet yet gentle persistence. Agnes had grown up in so many ways in her few full years of marriage. She had not her mother's dominant note, rather more of her father's gentle and delicate charm of presence, but she none the less carried her point with that persistent, gentle pressure which failed to create antagonism, yet which invariably achieved. It was of this reliant character that the mother sought help in the affliction with which her son had burdened her. Berry's letters had been only partially reassuring. The arrival of the younger Wards in New York was awaited with carefully concealed fear, a sort of united effort on the part of the three to brace themselves for another shock.

Ferol's fearlessness won them all. She entered the household without apology and with head up

and native wit active. If she suspected that her quaint speech and mannerisms might offend Berry's family, Ferol succeeded in hiding that suspicion from them all. Berry was secretly exultant and vastly amused. He carried his own end of the game with a high hand, which protected Ferol at every point. In Ferol's own picturesque terms, nobody called their bluff, because Ferol made good.

Without effort she diverted the father by her amusing simplicity and directness. Her southern way of slurring rs, dropping final consonants, her musical low voice, never ceased to delight his ear. With the knack of a clever parrot, Ferol cultivated the certain colloquialisms, which made a hit with her father-in-law. She approached Mrs. Ward more shyly, yet with an obvious effort to please, which balmed the older woman's wounds. Ferol's frankly expressed desire to learn; her attitude of respectful admiration for Mrs. Ward's attainments, soon disarmed her mother-in-law's fears. Ferol was an apt scholar, so that Berry's mother was soon occupied with the enthralling task of developing the possibilities of Berry's wife.

With Agnes, Ferol was at first exceedingly shy. Agnes was like those clever young married women at the hotel in San Francisco; she spoke the same mystifying language. Ferol set herself to learn the accomplishment, but it was one difficult to

acquire. Ferol understood the braggity big talk of her fellow Texans. She could bluff and feint and parry, but subtleties confused and tangled her. The purring way of the southern maid with men, the sugared, unfailing smile, the helpless appeal of wide open eyes and caressing fingers, never had been a habit with Ferol. Rather was her method of approach that of the southwestern pioneer, open, direct and hearty. Teasing was the accepted form of repartee in west Texas. Ferol could have been "hurrahed" and would have held her own. She had been cunningly adept at acquiring new methods for this old game; but for the new—the background of association and ideas, of custom and inheritance, was lacking to give her speech the light and subtle touch. It was an accomplishment which Ferol never entirely acquired. Her hinterland was too meagre and barren.

Agnes Trevor at once admitted Ferol's charm. From the beginning she divined Ferol's force and fearlessness, but the Texas waif grew into her affection and understanding gradually and without recourse to superlatives. Ferol's voice held Agnes Trevor's attention. She bore Ferol off to a singing master to have her voice tried. Ferol could sing, yes—but her speaking voice retained all that was best of those velvety and resonant qualities which made it so stirring and forceful.

Ferol adapted herself to the life of the city with

greater ease after her father-in-law had bought for her a riding horse. Having overcome her embarrassment as to knickerbockers and boots under the un-veiling coat, Ferol rode with ease and enjoyment, as only one can who has learned to ride astride as a child in the open, upon a cow-pony with the disposition of a fretful woman. Ferol had long since mastered the tricks of horsemanship. The daily rides kept her fit. She got to know every bridlepath in the Park and ranged much further than any one knew but the admiring groom who followed her. Berry rarely rode, and indeed none of the family at her unhallowed hour. Ferol loved upper New York in the early morning. The high wind-swept vantage points were her breathing places, where she paused to taste the mingled salt of the sea wind and the earthy flavour of the land breeze. She rode in the rain, in storms. She encountered her first snowstorm on horseback with throbbing heart and glowing wet cheeks, hushed—wordless from awe and the glory of it.

Art gallery and concert, opera and lecture, Ferol was given a taste of each, her susceptibilities carefully noted. She had no liking for the opera until she heard Mary Garden sing. The deep rich voice, the emotional power of the singer, touched an answering chord or force in Ferol. "Who is she? What is she?" Ferol asked Agnes. "I'd rather be Mary Garden than anybody."

But Agnes was not so sure. She was vague as to reasons: varied experiences, hardships perhaps, suffering. Ferol pressed eagerly for other, better reasons, not finding those named great stumbling blocks. She, too, had met these factors in life-moulding.

Forced out of her vague allusions, Agnes admitted ignorance. Her knowledge of the singer's life was of hearsay solely. "Of course I do not actually know that Mary Garden has had such unusual experiences," she admitted, "but she's an artist. To be an artist, it seems to me, one must have lived and loved and suffered before attempting to create the big strong rôles. No ordinary woman has the poise, the assurance. Perhaps the power is indicated by that very self-confidence. A woman of unusual force will have unusual experiences. She must be able to carry them off with a high hand."

"Not to be afraid, you mean?" asked Ferol.

"Not to be afraid either of the experience or of what it will do to her," replied Agnes. Then, more thoughtfully, "You have some of that poise yourself, Ferol. I have not. I'd rather be a person of lesser importance. I shouldn't know what to do with all that power."

Ferol looked at her sister-in-law keenly. She had not given herself the luxury of confidences with Agnes. With unerring reticence, she had kept the details of their marriage. She had

spoken briefly enough of her life before her marriage, of her people. But she found Agnes' face reassuring. She had spoken quite casually.

Ferol's own expression included an element of grimness as she answered, "I'm not afraid, not when I'm sure."

In the activity and colour of life in these familiar surroundings, Berry had lost some of his moodiness. His rare moments of black despair were reserved for their own apartments, when Ferol now met them blithely or with preoccupied indifference. These moods were beginning to lose their power to make her suffer. She could forget them in a book or get up and go away to where the others were congregated and where she soon found Berry's moods would not follow.

Surrounded by cultivated, kindly people, Ferol's intellectual outlook enlarged and was expanded to include much that was to her an unknown world. At this time woman suffrage was beginning to interest the minds of the cultivated wealthy class of women in New York. Agnes Trevor had become interested in Votes for Women during a season spent in London after her husband's death. She had worked quietly and persistently along those lines since her return home. Her mother was aware of these activities. They did not meet with her approval. Mr. Ward was gracefully tolerant to this fad of his daughter in the confident belief that it soon would be out-

grown, discarded. No open opposition was expressed to Agnes Trevor's suffrage work, but Mrs. Ward met it secretly with counter-plans and diversions which she hoped would succeed in putting a stop to the whole matter.

Ferol soon was aware of this hidden strife between mother and daughter. From curiosity and with a mingled feeling of assisting the pursued and foiling the pursuer, Ferol drew Agnes into explaining somewhat of the purpose and plan of the workers. She went with Agnes to the meetings and was at first confused and not a little bored. The vote seemed to Ferol so naturally to be a matter for men to bother about. That woman should desire to vote seemed as useless and as absurd as though, in her Texan vernacular, they should want to wear pants. Ferol's point of view naturally was based upon the talk which she had heard on the subject before leaving Texas. The southern man of her own class found the suffragette a peculiarly delicious morsel for ridicule and contempt. Up to this time Ferol herself had been inclined to sneer at the type. Now she saw the matter presented in a totally different light and one which somewhat flattered her vanity. Still she lacked deep interest. Ferol could not see that the question was one which touched her in any way. She was accustomed to thinking in terms of herself. She did not care to vote. Ferol

had everything she needed, that is—she found herself admitting, nearly everything. She was unable to grasp the significance of her own life in connection with others.

CHAPTER IX

THE memory of her life in Texas was to a large extent deftly blurred during the year which Ferol spent in the east. She ceased to yearn greatly for her mother, save when an occasional letter came, scrawled on cheap paper, blotted, but full of endearing and grateful terms. The kid's first letter had made her weep.

DEAR FEROL:

I don't know how we can get along without you. You are the best girl in the world and I believe everything you ever told me. If you say it's right to go off and get married then I thank so. Dad says he'll kill the man if he kin find him. Mama and I jus' had to make him stay at home and let us tend to this. He talks about gittin the law on him, but Midges says he ain't no call to devil you if you wanta go an' get married, 'cause you're full old. I love you.

your fond brother,
CLARENCE CLAUD RANKIN.

Ferol was generous with her people, but, following Berry's suggestion, not too generous. The regular and persistent monthly income gave to the Rankin family pride and place, also a singular

reticence. One and all they forebore to ask questions as to her new life. At first Ferol noticed these omissions and felt chilled. A lonely feeling grew in her heart, which somewhat uprooted her sacrificial ardour for her family. But in the face of her full and varied life, Ferol came to accept the new status philosophically.

The days passed like a flock of swallows; days when she had not time to think of the past, what with tutors in English, French, history, and—here was the trail of Agnes—economics. Ferol had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, which Mrs. Ward delighted in assuaging through masters of her own choosing. Ferol was sweet-tempered and easily led where her ambition urged; she accepted amiably the ruling of her time and affairs by another. Her ambitions were in complete accord with those of her mother-in-law. As long as her riding was not interfered with, Ferol had that definite space of time in which to work off her very occasional bursts of annoyance.

Ferol found a welcome among the friends of the Wards. She was a good listener and had such perfect control over her facial expression that she failed to make enemies or to create antagonisms. She rarely spoke of her own feelings or impressions unless forced by some especially insistent observer. On the whole, Mrs. Berwin Ward made rather a place for herself socially by her repose and reticence. When she spoke it was to the

point in that amusing drawl which became rather the fad to applaud.

More and more Ferol's time was divided from Berry's. Dancing which he did not care often to share; lessons from which he was rigidly excluded; teas and meetings, luncheons and rides; Berry dined with Ferol and that was about all. The first winter had been a mild one and Berry lingered on in New York without intending to remain, enjoying it in a new way through Ferol's eyes. The summer had overtaken him. But the following autumn Berry began to make plans for going to New Mexico. It was plain to Ferol that Berry must not spend another winter in New York. She had gained a more definite knowledge of Berry's health through recurring acute attacks, never serious but always alarming.

Berry was aware that in this complex city life Ferol was slipping away from him rather than growing closer to him as he desired. He fancied she accepted the hours shared with him with a sort of stoicism which he resented. Whether from design or accident, their hours together were shorter and full of silence, her fleeting tendernesses more rare. Ferol had become accustomed to him, but not in the way he had planned. The dependence which he had expected from one so ignorant and so alone but for him failed to reveal itself. Ferol still stood alone. Conforming her habits to meet his, at the same time she

created an aloofness which secretly dismayed and perplexed Berry. Ferol was not a person of keen physical reactions. She was too strong, too well-poised for such violences; her nervous system too perfectly organised and controlled. When he found himself unable to awaken Ferol's tenderness, Berry sought to arouse her antagonism; anything was better than the equable calm which she could assume and hold against his blackest moods. Did she divine and resent his desire, or did his longings arouse only pity? When he commanded, Ferol was obedient; when he raged, she was silent; when he questioned, she grew remote. At every point she persisted in eluding him while seeming to gratify his slightest whim.

Suffering from such a momentary fear, Berry caught her face between his two hands and looked steadily into her eyes. Ferol returned his gaze unflinchingly. With a sudden hardening of his heart, Berry drew her down beside him on the divan in their sitting room and held her so that she could not escape either his grasp or his scrutiny.

"If it's another man, by God, I'll kill him," he exclaimed violently. "Tell me," he cried, shaking her shoulders roughly, "is it some other man?"

Enraged at being so roughly handled, Ferol did not answer for a moment, but when she saw that she must pacify him, she exclaimed somewhat

petulantly, "Oh, Berry, don't. You know there is no other man."

Berry held her closer. He pushed back the soft, bright curls which hid her brow. The high forehead met his glance implacably. If only he could know what was going on behind that brow, so delicate to touch, so strong to resist! Her physical nearness calmed and reassured him.

"Ferol," he asked wistfully, "aren't you ever going to love me?"

"I do. You know I'm fond of you. Berry," she answered patiently.

"You don't know the first letter of love," Berry continued bitterly; "I don't believe you are capable of loving."

Such incidents filled Ferol with vague mortification. Without understanding perfectly either the cause or the effect, she felt herself degraded. Why should Berry so persistently mistrust her? She was conscious of an unfailing devotion to his needs which she felt should satisfy him. An untempted allegiance she took for loyalty. Other men actually failed to interest Ferol deeply; her mind was too busy grasping at knowledge to give play to adventures in sensation. Rarely did Ferol meet any man but Berry alone and then only in some short interval too brief to turn acquaintance into friendship. Men admired Mrs. Berry Ward. Unconsciously she intrigued them in no small degree. Some might have been drawn

easily into a warmer regard but for her elusive comprehension; she was scarcely aware of their existence. Occupied with other matters, the only emotion which stirred Ferol's heart was an occasional swift spasm of gratefulness or kindness toward the man who was her husband.

When Berry began to talk of a home in New Mexico, where they could remain the year around, Ferol at first was dismayed. So intent was she upon her studies that she shrank from the thought of giving them up. She had so much to learn that other people all about her had known from childhood. Then, too, some vague plan might have been forming in Ferol's mind as to a future more active intellectual life. There was something which she looked forward to accomplishing, yet she was unable to define even to herself just what she desired to do. Going away from New York meant giving up this chance at knowledge. A married woman could not carry a tutor about with her, not even a governess. Yet Berry must go.

Ferol was face to face with the limitations of her life with a sick husband. Filled with industry and ambition, fired by the intellectual activities about her, she must renounce all this because Berry was ill. With a patient wistfulness, Ferol gave up her studies, put aside her own desires and set herself to meet this fresh demand upon

her store of fortitude. Very winning and sweet was Ferol at this time. Only Agnes saw at what sacrifice Ferol was prepared to abandon New York. Yet Ferol concealed her regret fairly well, dissembled her self-denial by simulating an interest in the furnishings for the new home. Her youth and inexperience turned this exciting diversion into a true delight. Finally she and Berry found an intense mutual pleasure in this occupation, which filled up several distracting weeks.

An English maid long in Mrs. Ward's service induced her husband, who was butler in another family, to join her in going west with the younger Wards. Well-trained and capable, these two solved the problem of comfortable living in what the senior Mrs. Ward actually believed to be a wilderness. Ferol's inexperience was saved a severe test by this wise provision of her mother-in-law.

With increasing interest Ferol began to foreshadow in her mind this home in the hills of New Mexico—her own home, at last. San Vincente, Diamond City of the Hills it had been called in the early days before the advent of Americans. Ferol tried to vision the place in her mind. The high altitude which promised cool summers and frosty winters; the dry, desert-warmed atmosphere—every characteristic made San Vincente the desirable home for one of Berry's ailment.

Ferol was piqued into an interest which awakened in her consciousness the first promptings toward home building, dawning thoughts of constructive married life.

CHAPTER X

SAN VINCENTE had been a mining town so long that it had forgotten its beginning and rather prided itself upon its present arrival. It had become a health resort. Scattered up and down a draw, extending into the small ravines of the encroaching hills, the town had grown where it could get foothold, until it was a mile long, and fitfully narrow. From adobe and stone huts on Santa Guadalupe hill rising abruptly back of the railroad station, to the ample old brick mansion on the rich bottom lands belonging to Gregory Worthington, San Vincente extended its length on either side of the deep arroyo, marked by contrasts. Further up the draw, at Worthington's place and beyond, the arroyo widened, and the road running along its course, crossing from side to side when pressed for space by the steep, pebbly hills, gave access to the many substantial and picturesque homes built by the health-seekers on the slopes of the mounting hills. Here and there along the arroyo road, where some wider shelf of land was available, were situated several sanatoria for tubercular people. Through oak

groves, across juniper- and cedar-clad hills, up and down the slope of mountains, still the road persistently followed some water course until it rounded Beast Mountain and dropped down beyond the divide into the bed of Juniper Creek. This road was San Vincente.

Shut in by the hills from the winds and dust storms of the lower warmer valleys of New Mexico, San Vincente presented an ideal spot for the health-seeker. High and dry and cold, the town boasted itself unique, as it was in many ways. In the cosmopolitan population cowboy and miner and millionaire mingled without distinction and without visible difference. In the early days of New Mexico statehood San Vincente still remained a border town. The old Concord stage coach, the eight-horse freight team and the automobile passed in and out from the various mining camps with mail, passengers and ore. The country boasted an occasional holdup with which to divert the interest of the visiting easterner, but on the whole San Vincente could be said to have grown up and put aside its youthful pranks. The cowboy no longer shot up the town, being too busily occupied doing stunts to amuse the visiting eastern girls. The old-timers were too actively prosperous with supplying the demands of the health people to devote leisure to old-time pursuits. Gambling still persisted in the modern friendly game of Poker or Bridge, but the play-

ers, let it be understood, sat in the game for straight chips, or points.

Health-seekers of all classes were welcomed to San Vincente, but the wealthy class were met more than half way. It was said that every one in San Vincente had come out either for the head, the lungs or the reputation. This was further proof that San Vincente had forgotten her beginning.

With a government sanatorium ten miles away, which thrust upon San Vincente a group of dispossessed and idle wives of secluded sick army and navy officers, the village put on airs and talked about the line and precedence. As Volney Rusk so aptly put it, one had to be t.b. in San Vincente or lack social importance; so if not sick, one was forced at least to claim kinship among the elect.

People came to San Vincente preparing to die and remained to live and to enjoy life. The healthy-looking sick people and the wan-looking chaps who were bold enough to confess to being well here mingled and sometimes forgot their rôles. Every month the sanatoria turned out fresh groups of rosy, husky sick so loath to go back east that they kept on writing pitiful letters home in order to have recourse to remittance. The idle, care-free life added to the charm of the place which even the very sick felt. There were no tears and wailings, only smiles. If one were so unlucky as to be too late in arriving, he met the

end grateful for the last bright days—inspired with fresh hope even to the end. Sunshiny days, dry keen air that healed and then intoxicated, produced a population glad to be alive every hour of the day and which showed this gladness. The spirit of the place was infectious and combined with the open-air life made wonderful cures which were credited to the wise and wily doctors. The out-of-door life which everybody lived had a subtle effect indeed upon the minds of the inhabitants; gave them generous outlook, open mind and cordial, wholesome thoughts. They had a free western way too of welcoming the goose which was to lay the golden egg, that warmed the heart of the goose until he sometimes believed himself a swan. The sun shone daily (according to sanatoria booklets), and the life-giving air continued at the old stand; health and prosperity were upon the town. Surely to be a health resort were not without advantages.

Into this welcoming atmosphere came Berwin Ward and Ferol one January day in a snowstorm. It was nothing short of a blizzard that welcomed the Wards. The distant mountain ranges were shrouded from sight by a thick white veil of snow flakes which slapped the face like a wet curtain. The keen north wind swept down the draw, buffeting and beating upon the train climbing slowly up the canyon. On the back platform, wrapped in furs, Ferol and Berry stood enjoying

the storm. To Ferol snowstorms still were wonderful. How the snow swirled and eddied and swept down canyon with a roar, veiling the smelter into the semblance of a castle as it passed, blanketing the hidden, growing things in the Chinese garden.

When the station was reached and they stepped down upon the wet, muddy platform crowded with mud-splashed men, Berry skirted the line of howling bus men and put Ferol safely into a cab, whose driver met him with outstretched hand and called him by name. Before Berry could rejoin Ferol with the two servants, he was set upon by a group which threatened to carry him off. Ferol watched the group curiously. Lost in a fat fur coat and cap, with shining black eyes and red lips barely visible, a young woman was plying Berry with questions while a tall, distinguished-looking man had an arm about his shoulders.

"Come home with us," she heard the woman urge; "it would be a shame to take her to the hotel in such weather as this. We can put you up, servants and all. Greg, make him come!" appealing to the tall man. From this group Berry emerged laughing but firm. "Coming to see you to-morrow," several cried as he got into the cab. Ferol had a momentary feeling of loneliness in the midst of this welcome which she could not share. As they drove the short way through the muddy streets to the hotel, this feeling gave way

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to a certain excitement caused by the group of men in wide white Stetsons, high-heeled boots and muddy spurs standing about the entrance to the hotel. This looked more like Texas than anything Ferol had seen in a long while. She wanted to embrace them all.

They were lunching in the Chinese Kitchen when they were discovered by the same group Ferol had seen at the station. These proved to be Mr. and Mrs. Gregory Worthington and Volney Rusk, who joined them at the large table in the small side room into which they all barely fitted.

"We came to take you with us," announced Mrs. Worthington brightly, as she took Ferol's hand. Gregory Worthington echoed her request as he drew back the chair for his small wife, and seated himself opposite Ferol.

"Good Lord, man, you don't think we are going to let your wife suffer through your stupidity, do you? Mrs. Ward, we have a large and happy home. My wife is not a very good housekeeper, but I think we can make you comfortable with your two servants to assist."

"Oh, Greg, don't be a bromide," protested Mrs. Worthington, with another bird-like glance at Ferol. "He says that to everybody, Mrs. Ward, but you trust me."

"Julia is thinking of robbing you of your two servants, Berry—look out!" exclaimed Gregory Worthington. "We were at the train to meet two

perfectly good Jap boys who had promised to come, and they cometh not, you observe. But we have an empty touring car, and an eager welcome in our covetous hearts, so come by all means." Turning seriously to Berry Ward, "What d'ye want to hang around that hotel for? Don't you know it will drive you to drink, desperation and suicide in two days? Come with us. When the storm is over, Julia will take you house-hunting. I'll wager she already has one up her sleeve; if there is an empty house this side of the ranch and she doesn't know it, I'm done."

In the end they were all bundled into the touring car and off up the main street, while the servants came more slowly with the trunks. Along the arroyo road, past the mistifying houses wrapped in a white veil of snow, they drove, with Gregory's hands on the wheel, while the four remained comfortably seated in the body of the car, their feet on hot bricks. Ferol was somewhat silent, as was her habit in new surroundings, but taking eager notes of all that went on around her. She could see at once that Julia Worthington and Berry were excellent friends. Mrs. Worthington turned to Berry with a quick fire of eager small talk, leaving Ferol to Volney Rusk.

Rusk was an eastern visitor at the Worthington's,—typically a society man,—a guest who came regularly every winter, and as Julia Worthington averred, had to be insulted before he would

go home. Volney Rusk was very much the ladies' man, with just enough love of sport and ability to hold his own at the drinking game, to keep himself popular with the men. He turned to Ferol now with dark, pleading eyes and began to rattle along with small talk, which combination he usually found quite irresistible. He was small and dapper, with large dark eyes, in which lingered a caressing expression greatly admired by women. As he talked, Volney Rusk took in Mrs. Berwin Ward's points of beauty with clever, estimating phrase. "Gad, but she's got red hair. Poor Berry! And the skin that goes with it, thank the Lord! Rose red and snow white, ain't it the truth. And a mouth to keep Berry busy or some other fellow will. Clever too or I'm no judge. Doesn't chatter. Be afraid of the woman who doesn't chatter. Go slow, old man."

They drove across the arroyo and in at the iron gateway of Los Mirlos. The old brick house was a place of mystery in the blinding snow; lights gleamed from many windows, though it was still afternoon. A crowd of dogs fell upon them as they got out of the car and leaped and danced about in a frenzy of joy and recognition. They came in, dogs and all, through the dining room at the back of the house and emerged into the living room. A wonderful blaze of logs glittered under the wide-plastered fireplace; a couch, broad and littered with pillows, was placed facing the fire,

and backed by a large table strewn with books and magazines. The room was lined with bookshelves; books, books everywhere dimly seen through the soft flickering light of the room, where a shaded lamp and the fire were the only illumination. Curtains were drawn close to shut out the sight of the storm. Julia Worthington continued her interested conversation with Berry, standing against the fire light, her small graceful figure perfectly outlined, her furs and coat on the floor about her feet. She was still standing talking thus, Volney Rusk and Ferol wandering about the room, picking up here and there bits of art treasure which Volney explained to Ferol, when Gregory Worthington entered the room.

"Good Lord, Julia, don't you intend to feed your guests to-night? And aren't you going to show Mrs. Ward to her room?"

Julia Worthington went on with her talk undisturbed, while her husband sat down on the couch and began to make himself agreeable to Ferol. Presently Mrs. Worthington turned quietly to Gregory. "Greg," she said sweetly and slyly, "you show Mrs. Ward and Berry to their room. Vol, run out in the kitchen and see that Concepcion has not thrown herself into the soup." She picked up her wraps coolly and trailed off into the adjoining room, which was her bedroom. Gregory threw up his hands in despair, but arose

to the occasion with all the urbanity of the accustomed and accomplished host. He led them through the dining room into a large bedroom, where two narrow beds stood at one side, while opposite a great fireplace loomed. While the host threw some sticks of juniper on a bit of flaming paper and soon kindled a roaring fire, Ferol watched him keenly. What sort of man was this whose wife permitted him to assume her duties of hostess; who flouted her openly, yet acquiesced to her rudeness with charming grace? He was a type new to her experience.

Ferol drew near to the blaze and held out her hands toward its mounting warmth. The fragrance of the burning juniper drew her too. "How sweet it smells," she said in her deep, rich voice as she looked down at her host, kneeling before the blaze, waiting to assure himself of its persistence. Gregory Worthington looked up at Ferol, struck by the quality of her voice. He took a first keen look at her. Ferol had lost some of her girlish angularity of figure; more than a hint of rounded supple curves was suggested in the lines of her close-fitting cloth gown. Her straight back held her poised like a Greek statue. In her grey eyes was that shy elusiveness, a momentary warmth toward the man at her feet, lonely in soul perhaps, like herself, yet she was unable to analyse the sudden sympathy which drew her toward him. Her curved and baffling

lips, her inscrutable face, unyielding to changeful expression by actual movement, yet changing continually with an imperceptible flicker of eyes and lips, created for Worthington an inviting mystery. Looking up into her eyes, he suddenly felt himself excited; a queer, quick uprush of tenderness gathered in his throat.

"Do you like to live in the country?" he asked abruptly.

"I sure do," Ferol answered simply.

"I will take you over the farm to-morrow," he promised with enthusiasm, rising and brushing the wood scraps from his hands. "Do you ride?"

Berry groaned aloud.

"Look here, Greg," he interrupted, "I came out here to get my wife to myself, and here you are planning to run off with her first thing!"

Gregory Worthington laughed at him somewhat grimly. But his voice had no edge as he asserted cheerfully, "You'll worry along. You and Julia will be as thick as thieves until she has told you all the gossip. Don't be a crude bridegroom person, Berry, or you'll make yourself a laughing stock. Learn to be a sport!"

CHAPTER XI

LOS MIRLOS, Gregory Worthington's farm or ranch as it was variously called, was named for the blackbirds which nested in the old cottonwood trees about the place. Situated in rich bottom land with extending wings into neighbouring draws, the limited acreage had been developed by scientific methods into its highest power of productivity. The work had been an amusement and a diversion to Gregory Worthington. From apple orchard to terraced farm lands in the sheltered folds of the hills, Worthington kept accurate and scientific history of each acre of land under the most modern form of intensive cultivation. Exiled to this climate for his health, he had made Los Mirlos at once his hobby and his reason for existence. The knowledge which he had gained in study of agricultural methods in foreign countries, the facilities afforded by his own country for agricultural development, were used in making the place the scene of important experimental work, which attracted the attention of all agriculturists. Worthington might be persuaded to leave the farm for an occasional hunting or fishing expedition, but the re-

turn to his passion marked his content. In the work of managing this estate, Worthington had developed a rugged strength. Satisfied that he had hit upon the most favourable spot in his own country to live, in spite of his physical handicap, he had put into the work the study and effort which a man reserves for the crowning achievement of his life. He had come to stay!

Of unusual culture and widely travelled experience, Worthington filled his home with the trophies of his years of travels, the books and works of art which he so loved. And to this home he had brought his young wife. Gregory Worthington was twice as old as his wife. He had been a widower when he first met Julia Brace in Rome at a hunt meet on the campagna. Charmed with her simplicity, Gregory had pursued her through a Roman season and won her by an audacity and persistence which younger men might have envied. After the wedding in Rome, they had come across seas to San Vincente, to the ranch. The fruit trees about the old brick building were a mass of bloom; blackbirds were flashing their sable and scarlet wings in and out among the bare-limbed, graceful cottonwoods, calling with shrill insistence. The colour, the air, the sparkle of sunshine all charmed Julia Worthington. Keen sportswoman, lover of beauty in nature, the place offered her the open-air life which she most loved.

She entered Los Mirlos well pleased and had never regretted her coming.

"Greg packs me off bag and baggage when I get too shabby," she was explaining to Ferol as they stood on the brick terrace outside the living room the next morning, gazing upon the sparkling wonder world of snow and sunshine. "But for the need of new frocks I should never go." She spread out her arms toward the tall cottonwoods, the rows of fruit trees.

"I love it all," she cried; "I live out of doors. That is why Greg makes jokes about my housekeeping. I ride, I hunt, I fish, and I am happy. San Vincente satisfies me. The health colony changes continually; people come and go from all over the world. You will find every sort here from sea captain to high church clergyman, most of them exceptional persons, some of them famous. The victims of tuberculosis are usually young, often doing their best work when they are stricken. If they get well out here, they always come back after a brief return to civilisation. San Vincente casts a spell.

"Soon after I came we were invited to a quail supper, an out-of-door feast. The man sitting near me was a clean, healthy-looking chap in cowboy clothes. Before the evening was over he had given me a recipe for corn pudding and told me how a diamond cinch was tied. I thought him the real thing. Next day some one told me that he

was an eastern millionaire—his father president of a railroad system. Our clergyman is a man famous for his essays. Our nearest neighbour writes novels when she is not making love to her head dairyman, who is a member of one of Philadelphia's first families. People who don't know fancy a tubercular health resort a place of horror, when it is quite the contrary. It is cosmopolitan, changing, unconventional if you like, but a place where one may lead a free life out of doors, yet have all the privileges of association with people of one's own sort. We dine here like people all over the world, but we eat picnic suppers instead if the mood seizes us. If I had to go back again to the deadly dull conventional life of American cities, I'd perish. I have enough of it in a single month out of the year. Europe is little better, as formality exists wherever there are courts. Princes and presidents come our way occasionally. Other than health-seekers, a string of visitors keen for the hunting or out-of-door life or the beauty of the desert and mountains keeps us in touch with the world. We never lack variety, and that,—" Julia Brace smiled like a shrewd small gnome,—"is a necessity."

Ferol had listened to this flow of conversational patter with diverse emotions. She was interested in San Vincente and the life; she also envied Julia Brace the gift of self-expression. She found herself wishing with a sting of ambition that she

might be able to talk about herself or others in such a frank and engaging way. Perhaps Julia Worthington was not without knowledge of the impression she was creating in the mind of Berry's simple wife. She gave small thought to this beyond a warmth of satisfaction which was hers whenever she held the middle of the stage. She went into the house to get into her riding things. She was bent upon showing Berry a house which she knew of while Gregory and Ferol rode over the farm.

At luncheon they met about a well-set table. Gregory was annoyed that Julia had forgot to have meat sent out, but Julia and her guests were undisturbed. Whatever was lacking in Julia's hospitality was covered amusingly or cleverly by Greg's nonsense and ridicule.

The young hostess gaily recounted an experience of a short time before when she had followed deer tracks on Juniper Creek to a certain gap which her horse refused. After making a lengthy roundabout course to renew her investigations, she found, to her chagrin, that she had been on the track of Colonel Lander's private herd. She told these simple facts with childish wide-open eyes and staccato accents in her high sweet voice. Almost one might have been convinced that what she told was of interest, so aptly had she selected and coloured her material.

Men thought Mrs. Worthington clever, charm-

ing, unique. No man was too inconsiderable to be of use to Julia Brace as she was named rather persistently by her friends. Her egotism was such that she was forced to extract the flattery with which to keep her vanity alive. Driven by this insatiable appetite, she greeted each new man with a complete repertory of her tricks. Women found her immensely dull. But Mrs. Worthington did not regard women as of importance. Only the stupidly adoring or the socially ambitious did she consider, and then only when they could serve a purpose like a pawn. She was small and delicately formed. In her riding knickerbockers, her hair clubbed and out of sight, she became a slender boy. She was not pretty, but the bright dark eyes, low brow with strands of straight dark hair folded back over her ears, brought out advantageously the small, round head and fine features. In evening dress Mrs. Worthington was obscured beneath a weight of jewels and finery, but in the open she had the poise and fitness for her place of a miniature Diana.

Berry found Julia Brace as amusing as a child. He put her through her tricks like a clever fox terrier; fed her vanity with graceful ease of habit and without being annoyed when she demanded more. He teased her by alternating charmed interest with complete indifference, so that she watched him as though he were a trout and never altered her determination to land him.

She had a fad which Gregory Worthington was able to indulge. Old and rare books, not so much for their contents, did she love them, as for the texture of the paper, the clearness of the print. She liked to stroke their delicate bindings, to fondle them. Julia Brace affirmed that she travelled with a set of Shakespeare and another of De Morgan in the upper tray of her trunk. She was never without a small, delicate volume of one of Shakespeare's plays tucked away somewhere about her person, and she read De Morgan's novels far into the night, as the stand beside her bed could attest by the continual presence of the books. She had an affection for her husband, but his indulgence in her whims had made her more childish and persistent in her weaknesses than was necessary or amusing even to herself. Gregory Worthington had started out to treat his wife like a small adored child; she remained in the rôle to his eternal punishment when he had ceased to be amused with her childishness and most desired her to grow up.

Berry threw himself into a deep arm chair after luncheon, rolled a brown paper cigarette and prepared himself to be amused by Julia Brace. The sun had become obscured; it was beginning to snow again. They abandoned themselves to an afternoon by the fire.

Ferol had soon discovered that what she did was of importance to no one at all in this ménage. If

Julia Brace was bored, she showed it. If she did not want to talk, she was silent; and if she desired the exclusive attention of a single member of the company, she had it. Her guests followed her example.

In a corner of the divan, her feet tucked under her, Ferol sat with a book half open in her hand, aware of Berry's pleasant absorption in an undertone conversation with Julia. She still felt new to her surroundings, watchful. Volney Rusk came in from the dining room, paused to mark the air of withdrawal shown by Berry and Julia, then made straight for the divan. He sat down close to Ferol, throwing his half-smoked cigarette into the fire. He regarded Ferol intently, curiously, with his prominent dark eyes full upon her.

"Can you climb a tree?" he asked seriously.

Ferol answered him in her delightful drawl. "Can a bird fly?" she queried, as unsmiling as Rusk.

"Don't do it!" advised the youth earnestly. "Somebody'd shoot you for a red bird. Do you have red birds where you came from?"

"They call 'em cardinals properly," insisted Ferol entering into his nonsense.

"I know those chaps with the jolly red topknots. By jove, you did just escape protection under the bird law, didn't you!" Rusk meandered foolishly on.

"I know my hair's red," Ferol assured him.

"You don't mean it! I thought I was the only one in the whole world that had discovered it." He lowered his voice. "I'm crazy about it. I'd like to touch it, do you know! I've even thought about that," he admitted candidly.

"Better not; it might burn you," answered Ferol dryly.

Gregory Worthington came in carrying a big log, which he placed carefully in the fireplace, creating a joyous roar of flames and a swift scattering upward of sparks. He paused a moment gazing into the fire. Gregory had noted the two groups widely separated in the ample living room. With suave tactfulness, he included both in his opening remark as he turned from his contemplation of the flames and stood facing them, warming his hands behind him.

"Has Julia told you of her row with Fanny Hay?" he asked Berry, at the same time glancing significantly toward Volney Rusk.

"It wasn't really a quarrel," protested Julia, pleased at once to find herself the centre of discussion.

"Well, it wasn't exactly a love feast either, Berry; no, nor a gathering for friendly discussion," urged Greg mockingly. "It might be called a case of too much Julia," he conceded judiciously.

Julia Brace made a small face at her husband. "Shut up, Old Top," she pouted childishly, "can't have too much Julia!" She turned to Berry

seriously. "It was Fanny's own fault," she explained; "she made it a personal matter. I was ridiculing the way some of the women out here get themselves up for riding, affecting the wild and woolly west, trying to dress like Pocahontases or cowboys or something queer."

"And you were miffed because Fanny said the cowboys had been making fun of your breeches and yashmak," rejoined Gregory Worthington meanly. "She rode about, Berry, with a long white veil tied over her nose and chin as though she had escaped from some haremlik. The cowboys called her Fatima, Fanny says."

"Don't be spiteful, Greg, just because the cowboys admire your wife. I wore the veil in the spring to shield my mouth from the dust, just as the cowboys wear their red bandanas, not as Fanny——"

"Just where does Fanny come in?" interrupted Berry mildly.

"Oh, Fanny did not like what I said about the women dressing for the woolly western part. I insisted that only the tenderfoot did that sort of thing, and Fanny said, 'Well, I wear a red bandana and a wide-brimmed hat when I ride!' "

"What did you reply?" queried Berry.

"I said, 'Don't you think you've been here long enough to know better, Fanny?' And she actually became angry at just that. Now wasn't that absurd, Berry?" Julia Brace urged.

"A few more drinks and they would have been at it tooth and nail," interposed Volney Rusk sorely.

"Don't you talk about drinks!" commanded Julia Brace hotly.

"Well, weren't you both drinking highballs, and would it ever have happened if you had not?" protested Rusk. "I was the sufferer by the whole thing. I should be allowed a voice."

Gregory Worthington and Julia turned upon him in cold disdain and cried in unison, "You, the sufferer!"

"Just what part did Vol play?" urged Berry, trying to get at the truth of the tale.

Julia Brace's eyes flashed. "It was a mean revenge for Fanny Hay to take, but I'm sure it never could have happened with any one else. Vol is so,—so light weight as to head!"

Volney Rusk went off in a gale of inconsequent laughter as Gregory Worthington took up the tale to its end.

"Julia was giving a party a few days later for Vol, who was, as usual, our guest. Jimmy Wagstaff is worshipping at Fan's shrine these days and he developed a grouch over Fanny's miff at Julia to put himself right with Fan. The morning of the day of the party the bunch was sitting around on Fan's porch trying to cheer Wils by following his pace at highballs when one of them conceived the bright idea of having Vol in and

fixing him right." Gregory looked at Volney Rusk with withering glance. "And that blithering beauty did his stupid best to aid and abet the scheme."

"I tried to break away twice—twice that I can remember," growled Volney Rusk.

"Oh, idiot!" protested Julia Brace serenely.

"Anyhow," continued Gregory, "they filled him up at the house, then took him to the Chinaman's and finished him. I rescued the remains at 7:30 and brought him home like a sack of flour. I swear to you, Berry, he was dead to the world. I had to lock him up in Julia's room. We couldn't wake him up. He slept during the entire party—his party, d'ye get that?"

"And I was forced to excuse the absence of the guest of honour to Fanny Hay on the plea of sudden illness. Jimmy Wagstaff insisted upon seeing him, out loud before them all. Greg took him out in the dining room and I never did know what he did to him, but at that moment I hoped he would punch his head good," Julia continued wrathfully.

"So you and Fanny are at outs?" questioned Berry, mildly amused.

"Oh, no. Wils had an acute attack right after that, and we were all too busy taking sporting chances as to which of the bunch Fanny would marry, to hold the grudge. And then Wils got well, as he always does. Mrs. Hill says a divine

Providence delayed Wils going for the express purpose of keeping the Bridge Club intact, and when she tells the story, she adds, 'or to bring Fanny and Julia Brace to their senses.' "

"Who is Mrs. Hill?" asked Berry.

Julia Brace's face softened as she answered very softly, "Mrs. Hill? She is our sprig of lavender. She keeps us sweet and clean. Mad or bad whichever we may be, Mrs. Hill's presence heals and makes us sane. She is good, unbelievably good, but so human that we all forgive her!"

A silence followed this little eulogy which seemed rather to embarrass Julia than to be a tribute to her powers.

Ferol felt a strange sinking at heart. Mrs. Hill! Surely no! The world was too large for such a meeting. Yet the tribute which Julia Brace paid to Mrs. Hill brought before Ferol clearly the sweet, stern face of an older woman looking into hers. She heard again that weak, weary voice speaking of her mother. It was saying, "Perhaps she'd rather have died."

CHAPTER XII

THE first time she saw the place Ferol loved it and named it Meadowlark. She and Berry and Mrs. Worthington had ridden out the few miles from town to have a look around. As they neared the place, the meadowlarks bugled from every fence post, flashed up with gorgeous yellow waistcoats and black cravats, as insistent as the sweet and liquid notes of their song. The winding road, leading off from the wider travelled road to the Fort, lured Ferol from the first turn. The birds gave her heart a wrench of homesickness, the cedar trees, scant at first and presently grouped into a faint suggestion of a wood as they approached the house, recalled to her the meagre oak groves and mesquite of her own land. It was all unexpectedly dear after the barren hills crossed in coming from town.

And then the rambling two story house, built on the slope of the hill so that the entrance from the road was at the rear by way of the second floor, while the forward part of the house extended out at an angle to the hill, upon a strong stone foundation. A wide straight hall led into the living room at the other end. This was a room

all windows, looking out upon the cedars and junipers as they straggled down the hill and up on the other side of the draw. Across was a wide sweep of hills, rippling in successive, glimmering folds to the distant horizon where the head of the Kneeling Sister was faintly visible. The room, open on three sides, was flooded with sunshine. A wide stone fireplace faced the glare of light from the windows. Her back turned to the others, Ferol stood looking out on the wide, far-reaching distance spread before her. There was a freedom in this outlook, a promise almost. She held her breath in a moment's fearful anxiety as to Berry's first remark. It was reassuring.

"Jove, the peace of it!" he exclaimed, "far enough away from town to be alone occasionally." He looked at Ferol, but she kept her back turned persistently, fearful that he should see the gladness in her eyes and be dampened by her very ardour.

"All this wooded land has been fenced in and held by old Miller for years," Julia Worthington was explaining, "otherwise the trees would have been gone for firewood, denuded like the hills everywhere around the town. But the old man loved the place. He thought it the most sightly anywhere near San Vincente, and he was right. When he sold it to von Engen, he needed money to make good his cattle losses. Von Engen put in the ground tank and well up there on the hill,"

pointing to the top of the slope above the road and back of the house, "and placed the house for the view as well as for the water power. You will find it complete and modern, as far as any place could be so far from gas and electricity. I shouldn't wonder if you could find good hunting on the place when the season opens, Berry. I have seen quail down there in the bosque along the stream, a covey or two every time I pass the land. It has been so long preserved from cattle and hunters that the full undergrowth attracts the birds."

The rooms were large enough and not too numerous. A small servants' house was hidden in the cedar trees a short distance from the house; outhouses, corral and chicken yards were placed to include the thin, unfailing stream which flowed through the draw. The gravity water works system was an unexpected advantage. Sleeping porches, which Ferol called galleries, were hung out into the tree tops like bird houses, while the birds themselves called from every tree and shrub.

"Think you could stand it this far from town, Ladybird?" asked Berry in an undertone as they passed through the rooms. Ferol gave him one of her rare, tender smiles, noting his mood, and answered, "Oh, Bunch, it sure is like home."

Berry bought the place of von Engen's agent for a price which caused him to smile and the agent to explain. "Von Engen got tired of the

place; he doesn't come here any more and he wants to get rid of it. It is too far from town for any but the sick people, so it goes to the first bidder, but it is a sacrifice, you know that."

Furniture had been shipped some time before they left New York, so it was a question of but a short while before they were settled and at home in Meadowlark. It became so popular almost at once as an end to driving or riding parties, that Berry threatened to put out a signboard for Meadowlark Inn, and to charge for refreshment.

Ferol made a point of a very substantial tea table to offset Berry's open hand at the buffet. She had learned to be afraid of drink. She did not like its effect upon herself or others; Berry was especially surly when drinking hard. So she made her tea table a lure with the wonderful cakes and scones which Esther knew how to make. After the drive from town hot scones with real white country butter and a cup of fragrant hot tea often proved more popular than the fancy drinks which Berry mixed on the long mahogany sideboard in the dining room, so that he had to abandon his post for lack of company.

With two well-trained English servants in the house and a good Mexican to care for the horses and do the rough work on the place, assisted by wife and children, housekeeping did not present itself at any time as a problem to Ferol. A telephone to town protected from emergency, and

some one on the place drove to town once a day for mail and supplies. At first Berry and Ferol depended solely upon their riding horses in visiting, but before the first summer was well begun Berry had bought a touring car, and the distance to town was shortened to a twenty-minute drive.

Everybody came to call, from the officers' wives who held themselves as ranking first, to the wives of the old-timers whose years of frontier life, met bravely and with fortitude, surely entitled them to unusual consideration. Berry was popular with men and women alike. He had a courteous free way which won the women and a force underneath his polished manner which made itself felt as well by men. The democracy of a small town brought acquaintances of every type, and Ferol welcomed them all. Her lack of small talk created an impression of wisdom which amazed her. She was credited even with wit in her infrequent, quaint speeches. Her apparent, friendly interest and lack of critical words gave her a reputation for good nature which continually belied the colour of her hair. But Ferol was not critical. She had simple ideas which she supposed she held in common with every one else.

Ferol's egotism had suffered ruthless destruction during the two years of her married life. She shrank in her own regard with each illuminating experience. Only the sturdy, individual poise which innate force gave to her saved her from the

other extreme of self-belittling. Slowly Ferol's consciousness was grasping the complex life of the world, its traditions and conventions. And as these grew more definite in her mind, she became acutely aware of her own cardinal sin. The memory of it now stirred in her an ache of regret, a shamed disgust, not so much for the sin as for the ignorance which had permitted her so to act. She saw herself clearly as the wretched victim of her own ignorance. She was too large-minded to place the blame where it belonged, on others. Those others who bore a part in producing her were too numerous, too remote, too much victims, as she had been, of surroundings.

Nor was her Dad to blame, Ferol was sure, nor yet her darling Midges; both had upheld virtue to her youthful consciousness. But the shiftlessness of her parents, their lack of moral courage, these were influences in her undoing, too subtle to be understood by one of Ferol's practical and limited reasoning. She did not once think of blaming Berry. In her generous soul she assumed complete responsibility for her act.

The religious teachings of Ferol's upbringing promised eternal fire for her sin. But Ferol, like many others in her initial surroundings, took religion to mean a day's penance. Sunday—the day to be good, to go to church three times a day; to forgive those who trespassed against us; to give way to emotional protestations of religious fer-

vour, to shout if need be. But Monday came with its normal behaviour of self-interest, self-satisfaction. Religion was not considered practical or necessary for week days.

Ferol no longer accepted the theory of eternal fire upon which she had been brought up with emotional intensity. Berry's agnosticism, his cynicism, had had a broadening effect upon her religious convictions. She was dimly aware that life itself might hold for her the punishment for her sin. But it was not Ferol's nature to fret her mind with introspection. When she thought of the past, which was by no means often, she was gripped with momentary horror. In the brief poignant moments of her sin consciousness, Ferol suffered. She kept these anguished moments to herself. Relentlessly she practised the habit of rooting such thoughts from her mind. She felt that she had indeed buried the past and she did not propose to be terrorised by its ghost. Berry had forgotten the informality of their beginning —why should not she! The streak of iron in Ferol's makeup here came to the fore as in the days of her sinning. She closed her heart, shut her eyes and ears, and went ahead. What had to be must be. With a naturally eager, active mind she turned to the place itself with strong young hope.

Meadowlark at once became beloved. Ferol would escape from the influx of guests and lose

herself in the bosque. She found the top of all the small encircling hills, traced each dry water-course through the long golden hours, lured by the call of the kildeer, the elusive flight of a small cottontail. And always on horseback, since she found no delight in walking. Berry insisted that her feet were too tiny to be of use.

The vast army of birds were furnished with birdseed at once and they soon came to know and depend upon her. When the bluebirds flew close to feed upon the juniper berries, Ferol would lean from her windows and greet them with friendly chirpings. As the days grew warmer, she thought wistfully of the Texas cardinal flashing through the live oaks, singing noisily from the bare branches of the mesquite tree.

Ferol had soon come to know Captain Wilson Hay and Mrs. Hay, whose intimacy with the Worthingtons had in no way been disrupted by the absurd quarrel between Julia and Fanny. Captain Hay had been permitted to leave the Fort and had come to town to live with his wife and child. This as they all knew was virtually his death warrant. The government did not set free from the service its trained and valuable officers until hope was quite gone. But the Hays lived in seeming disregard of the approaching end. Fanny put on a bold front and made merry with friends on the broad verandah of their home in town, where Wils swung blithely in his chaser

chair and talked about the home they were going to build when he should be retired. Wils Junior ranged about the hilly yard on a broom stick and dreamed of the day when he should be a really truly cowboy 'nless he was a soldier like Daddy.

Ferol enjoyed Wils Junior. She sometimes slipped away from the others and sought him in his lair in the wood shed; they had great games together, from which she came away with an ache of longing in her heart. Those little girls at home! How they must have grown in two years! And the kid; he was a man now. Letters from her people were infrequent. They overflowed with love and sentimentality but were slight food for a hungry heart.

Around the side of the house Ferol came one day with young Wils to find the usual tea time group on the wide porch. Jimmy Wagstaff had come down from his studio on the neighbouring hill side. Jimmy had two absorbing pursuits. He painted landscapes and worshipped Fanny Hay. With skilful fingers he made the canvas alive with glowing colour, mingling his dreams with his vision until his purple mountains proclaimed the touch of the sunset; his vanishing roadway among the yucca spears promised the desert beyond.

Fanny sat now beside the tea things, Jimmy at her feet with brooding eyes; her own turned with tender watchfulness to the wide couch where Wils

Hay lay enthroned among the pillows, his eager eyes bright with fever, his answering smile leaping to hers. Ferol and Wils Junior came up the steps blithely. They had a vinegarone in a bottle, which they bore proudly to show Daddy.

"Catched him, we did, Ferol an' me," proclaimed Wils Junior excitedly. "Ferol she poked him 'n bottle wiv a stick."

An older woman sat beside Captain Hay, a cup of tea in one slender hand resting on the arm of her chair. She was tall, thin and wrapped in furs in spite of the sunshine streaming over the porch, warming even the boards to comfort for the feet. She turned eagerly at the sound of the child's voice and held out her hand. She touched Ferol instead of Wils Junior, as they approached triumphantly to show Daddy the horrible beastie. Ferol stopped short. She stood looking down into the kind blue eyes upturned to her own. She felt herself drawn by the same sweet and tender smile which seemed born of poignant depths in the older woman's heart. It was Mrs. Hill, her Mrs. Hill.

The blood ebbed slowly from Ferol's glowing face as she barely acknowledged Fanny Hay's careless introduction, but Mrs. Hill rose and faced the girl with a sudden swift caressing movement which concealed her surprise. She took Ferol's hands in both of hers and looked earnestly into the grey eyes which she had once found so cold and repellent. Surprised in a moment of warmth

and tenderness, the grey eyes were darkened and deepened by dilated pupils. An expression of eager wistfulness escaped with the warmth and colour from Ferol's face. With pale lips she stood like one stricken, gazing into the other woman's face.

"I have heard so much of you from every one," Mrs. Hill was saying; "I am glad." With these vague words Mrs. Hill turned at once to the child and his father, absorbing herself in drawing out the childish tale of capture. Ferol went to sit on the steps with Jimmy Wagstaff and Volney Rusk. She was overwhelmed, speechless, but the colour was coming back into her cheeks and she held her head high.

Volney Rusk seized the opportunity to whisper to Ferol with extreme secrecy. "Will you ride down to the cattle pens with me in the morning?" But Wagstaff heard him.

"I'm going, too," he announced loudly, attracting the attention of the others.

"Where?"

Rusk regarded them all ruefully. "Jimmy, you are as impossible as the pictures you paint," he wailed. "Can't I have any thrills in my romance? I am asking Mrs. Ward to go to the round-up with me," he announced brazenly, "and none of the rest of you is asked or even desired."

"We'll all come," responded Fanny Hay pleasantly. "It is kind of you to want us, Vol. I will

dress up in my red bandana and pose as a tenderfoot. You may make the cowboys think I'm a new girl from the east if you like."

Volney Rusk groaned. "Well, you may go, Fanny," he admitted grudgingly, "but not Jimmy. He offends me, and he rides like a sack of meal."

"But I want to go," insisted Mrs. Hill, "and if I go, Mr. Ward will have to go to look after me. I sha'n't promise not to take Henry, either. I may need two men."

"Oh, well, if you're going to make it a family party," protested Volney Rusk, "let Berry drive down and then Wils can go along." So the matter arranged itself while Ferol sat under cover of the discussion, staring at the white fence posts of Wils Hay's front yard.

She saw the past that she had buried in her heart, the sin which still lived in the spirit to torture her, suddenly arise in power; the past to resume its presence, take on new life. The ugly truth would become known in San Vincente. Sneering glances and unkind remarks would be her portion. She and Berry might find it necessary to go away.

CHAPTER XIII

A ROUND-UP near San Vincente was somewhat of a feat. Only in the widening draw below the cattle pens was such a gathering possible. In the glowing June warmth the cattle were gathered into a lowing, moaning bunch about a drinking place. A fine dust filled the air from the restless movement of many hoofs. The roar of the cattle had a fitful accompaniment in the rushing feet of the cow-ponies as they dashed after a wandering steer, rounding it back to the herd with swift precision. The cowboys were dressed for inspection with clean bright handkerchiefs about their necks and clean flannel shirts. Spurs were brighter for a sly polish, boots free of mud and dust; the cowboys rode with dash and flourish for the benefit of bright girlish eyes in the crowds of visitors which came and went from the town.

The buyers sat in automobiles waiting for the cattle to finish drinking. They got out of the cars and awkwardly mounted the horses which the cowboys brought to them. They rode with the owners through the cattle, pointing here and there to a poor-looking beast, which would be cut out and driven to one side. Soon a small herd of cut-

backs flanked the larger group of cattle. It had been a hard year for cattle, that was conceded on every side. But the owners rode imperturbable. Cowboys coming to the chuck wagon from time to time for a drink of water said the old man was sore. The old man was Colonel Lander, the largest cattle owner in the country, about whom many picturesque and strange tales were told.

Ferol on horseback was listening to a cowboy's talk with Jimmy Wagstaff. Jimmy knew and was close friends with every cowboy in the country. With his painting outfit strapped to his horse, he found a welcome at any hour of the day or night at ranch or watering hole, wherever the cowboys foregathered. He could ride and cook and tell a good strong tale with the best of them. The cook, a slender, spectacled youth with a smile hovering about his lips, was bending over the trench of fire, turning the steaks in the shallow grease in the bottom of one of the black pots hanging from the iron support.

The cowboy was talking to Jimmy with apparent blindness to the proximity of a young and pretty woman, but his picturesque language showed him wise to his audience.

"Bud, how d'ye lose the first flunkey?" he drawled to the cook.

The cook smiled eagerly. "He was one o' them natural settlers," he replied, "an' we foun' we couldn' use him nohow."

The cowboy continued to Jimmy: "Well, anyhow, Bud, he picked up a new one yistiddy. Bud shore is a good cook, but he can't git away from the ivories. After supper last night Bud started a game. The boys was sort a wore out from the long drive an' he couldn' get much of a start, so he had to take on the flunkey fer a hand. I reckon they played quite some time, anyhow when Bud's alarm clock went off at 4 G. M. this mawnin', the flunkey got up an' moved his bed where he wouldn't be disturbed by no early-risers. Bud he called him a few times, then Colonel Landers spoke to him right sharp. After the boys was through with breakfast they tied the flunkey up in his bed all safe and cosy so's he wouldn't be disturbed no how. Time come to move on and the flunkey was still nappin', so Matt gave him his time."

Ferol gazed upon the shifting scene with keen eyes. This interest was returned surreptitiously by the cowboys, who however were still shy of the newly introduced conventional riding garb for women. None is so hidebound in his conventionality in regard to women as the cowboy. He might overlook overalls for a very young girl on a ticklish trail, but riding breeches half concealed under the flying skirts of a long coat excited his derision and choicest sarcasm. The women seemed unaware of the antagonism they aroused. And they could ride. Even the cowboys grudg-

ingly admitted that, as they watched the women put their horses to a wide arroyo and scramble up the steep side of the draw.

Ferol watched them idly from her place by the chuck wagon. She saw Julia Brace and Berry reach the top of the acclivity and start off smartly along the Crest Road. Evidently they were going home that way. From his seat at the wheel in his big touring car, Gregory Worthington watched them too, with lowering brow. He had brought Mr. and Mrs. Hill, Fanny and Wils Junior in his car. Gregory glanced from the receding figures outlined against the clear blue sky, to Ferol, and met her eyes. He smiled warmly at her and signalled her to come closer to the car. But Ferol only waved her hand. She had passed a wakeful night, uneasily facing the situation in which she found herself, but as usual she had kept her own counsel. The Hills had come to San Vincente to stay, as she and Berry had. After many lonely, exiled winters, Mrs. Hill was enabled to welcome the withdrawal of her husband from active duties, retaining a comfortable income from the business which he had established. On this income they could manage to live fairly well in the west. A small home with a few acres extending back into the hills had been purchased, and Mr. Hill was finding occupation and contentment in chicken-raising on a small scale. To Mrs. Hill this life in San Vincente with her beloved husband

savoured of elixir of life, a draught which she almost had ceased to dare hope might touch her lips. She had gained strength and resistance from Henry Hill's constant nearness to her, exulted in her ability to join in the social life of the place and counted the succeeding days most precious on her rosary of existence.

Ferol still sat upon her horse, apart, attended by the faithful Volney and Jimmy Wagstaff, listening to their chaff with the passing cowboys, still brooding upon how to meet this ghost of her inexperience and girlish confidence.

"Did you ever hear the tale of Colonel Landers and Bob Williams?" Jimmy was asking Volney Rusk. Without waiting for an encouraging reply, Wagstaff continued.

"Bob is a sort of town character, one of those who sit around and talk a lot and never do much else. He is a republican, politically, and not long ago he achieved the star part of running for county clerk. Nobody else in his party happened to want the place, so he got the nomination. Colonel Landers as everybody knows is a Texan, and of course a democrat. Knowing Colonel Landers' power in the community, Bob decided to ask him for his vote. He went up to the Colonel one day as he sat his horse in front of the postoffice, and said, 'Colonel Landers, will you answer me two questions frankly and freely?'

"A man of few words is the Colonel. 'Hell, yes,' he said.

" 'Will you vote for me for county clerk?' asked Bob.

" 'Hell, no,' answered the Colonel."

In the laughter which followed this tale, Ferol broke away from the group and rode up to the Worthington car. Mrs. Hill called to her as she approached.

"I want my husband to know you, Mrs. Ward," she said. Ferol leaned forward and clasped the hand Henry Hill offered her from the car. The big, firm handclasp, the kind, cool, brown eyes which looked quizzically into hers, gave Ferol fresh courage. Mrs. Hill had not told her husband.

"We have been talking of coming to Meadowlark for weeks, Mrs. Ward," Mr. Hill said. "I have met your husband frequently and heard such wonderful accounts of the place that I am determined to come to see you, and if my wife won't join me, I'm coming alone."

"Nonsense, Henry," said Mrs. Hill; "you will make Mrs. Ward think it is my fault our not coming. The truth is that I can't get Henry away from his chickens. You should see him put them to bed one by one. He spends hours fussing over the whims of those old hens. But the houses are all up now and grounds laid out so that I can hope to get him away now and then. We are coming.

In the meanwhile, do you stop in passing. San Vincente does not wait for ceremonious calls, and since we are all going to live here we must be neighbourly. Will you come?"

Ferol did not know what she said in reply. She got away finally and with Vulney Rusk took the leap and climb which led up to the Crest Road. Upon this hard gravelly road running along the ridge three miles back to town, they walked their horses slowly, glancing down into the draw below the cattle pens, where the cattle and riders looked like active ants busy about an ant hill. Before them the road curved in and out along the crest of the hill. To the right in the distance, the figure of the Kneeling Sister stood out at the foot of the cliff where legend had her turned to stone in escaping from the convent with her lover. Beyond, a distant range of amethyst mountains was shaded and dappled by the blue shadows of tumbling white clouds. It was nearing the time for the rainy season in San Vincente and the clouds marched their mighty way across the heavens many times a day, only to sink into a dull and lifeless sunset with no further hint of rain.

Far ahead of them Beast Mountain reared its vast hump against the cloud-flecked sky, and the pointed tips of Piedras Negras pointed another landmark to the traveller. Close at hand, spiked with occasional tufts of yucca and grey bunches of grass, was the pebble-strewn roadway which

led on before them toward the brown distant hills, the violet ranges beyond.

Absorbed for a time in the beauty and spread of the scene, Ferol ignored her companion, let her vexed and tormented mind come to rest under the soothing influence of beauty. The world was very harmonious. Perhaps after all there was no need to worry. What if Mrs. Hill did tell the story of her beginning with Berry? None might believe it. She had heard many such stories dismissed with careless comment since coming to San Vincente.

The health colony was not given to too close scrutiny of the actions of its inmates. For the most part, they were travelled men and women of the world, prone to look for what was wholesome and amusing rather than to suspect evil; quick to make excuses for those who lacked strength of character or balance-wheel with which to check a certain restlessness, inevitably a part of the life they all led. Mistakes were readily overlooked and real discrepancies covered by a friendly if mistaken zeal. The colony enjoyed a wider freedom of action than Ferol had ever known to exist, until coming here. Married women went about with as much freedom of action as the young girls, and were less criticised among themselves. Ferol had not observed that the women misused this freedom.

If the townspeople had been shocked originally by the appearance among them of the young ma-

tron surrounded by her young men admirers, they had long since ceased to make their disapproval evident, whether from business reasons or lack of desire to censure was not known. Much of the liberty used by women was regarded leniently; freedom for one's self and for others was a part of the far west. It was so unlike the censorious scrutiny of actions usual to small town life such as Ferol had known that she was scarcely able to grasp its fulness. Underlying this liberty of conduct was the seriousness of life itself—the clutch of fate which had moved these people thither and which held them in iron grasp, so powerful as to constitute a motif around which all minor circumstances of environment and living were grouped as chords, arpeggios, insignificant variants dropping away from the true melody of life which ended with taps,—a bugle call for which they all listened.

The riders had reached the summit of the hill which overlooked San Vincente. Below them the road wound in and out among adobe huts and cobble shacks. Mexican children were playing in the road. At the chapel of Santa Guadalupe on the top of the hill, children were playing beside the neglected grave of the donor of the little church. Here lay another woman who had sinned —one who had built this chapel in the hope of buying back her immortal soul. The priests had refused to consecrate her gift and the woman had

passed hopelessly into purgatory, according to the legend. Ferol knew the story.

Ferol and Volney passed slowly down the hill and through the village at a canter. They crossed the arroyo bridge and trotted their horses along the flat toward the Fort road. Mexican poppies were flaunting their white crinkled petals and yellow hearts to the sun. A few preceding weeks of rain had lifted the prickly thistle leaves of the poppies upon the slender erect stems far above the usual knee-deep stature. Ahead of them a wagon from the Fort, drawn by four strong mules, was driving out with officers and mail. As they climbed the white dusty hill and turned into the branch of the road leading to Meadowlark, Volney Rusk challenged Ferol's attention.

"Allowances made for dreams of disturbing cowboys and glimpses of brass button," he was saying, "but still no occasion for stony stare. What have I done, Mrs. Berry, to merit your displeasure, tell me that?"

Ferol laughed and put spur to her horse. They raced along the undulating road and came up to the wide open door of Meadowlark with a flourish. They dismounted and went into the living room. Berry had not yet arrived.

"He'll be along as soon as he takes Julia home," said Ferol; "reckon you'd better resign yourself to luncheon with us, Volney."

"Such is my serious intention and my hope is

that Berry will be tactful enough to lunch with Julia Brace so that she will not miss me," he announced, throwing himself into a leather chair by the fireplace only to jump to his feet and kneel to remove Ferol's spurs.

"Oh, don't bother," protested Ferol idly.

Volney knelt at her feet with one small boot resting on his knee, his hand on the buckle, prepared to give it the flip which would set the small spur free. He looked up at Ferol, his brown eyes veiled with a misty tenderness.

"Will you never take me seriously?" he murmured gently, laying one spur upon the floor and unbuckling the other. "Am I only a clown to you?"

Ferol looked down at him and laughed. There was a lure in Ferol's laughter, a low ripple like the sweet note of some bird in a high, rocky shut-in canyon, a wild trill to it of a thing untamed, which her self-control continually denied.

Volney Rusk suddenly hid his face against Ferol's knee. She looked at him, still laughing, slow to comprehend the quick change of the other's mood. She felt the trembling of his shoulder pressed against her knee.

"Volney," she said quickly, "get up."

The young man got slowly to his feet and faced her, his dark skin suffused with colour, his heavy-lidded eyes veiling his emotion. Ferol was gazing at him in surprise. With a sudden hardness she

looked at him with steely eyes, her lips curled scornfully.

"Don't be a fool, Volney Rusk," she said.

At that moment Berry entered the room soundlessly. With an intent glance he looked from one to the other. "What's up?" he asked lightly, yet with an undertone of iron in his voice which matched the look in Ferol's eyes.

Ferol laughed and turned away. She took off her hat deliberately and then came back to them, fluffing out her red wavy hair about her temples.

"Vol's mad," she said carelessly. "But his eyes really are too dressy for a man, aren't they, Berry? His vanity is wounded."

Volney Rusk turned to Berry Ward with a shrug of the shoulders. "She's jealous, by Gad. Jealous of my beaux yeux, Berry. Now aren't she and Julia Brace a pair!"

CHAPTER XIV

IT was not in the nature of Ferol Ward to wait for a crisis. She was a creature of acts, rather than ideas, and her individuality was greater than the crisis which she evoked. Ferol frequently overshadowed and belittled the experiences which came to her, as in the case of young Rusk. When Volney Rusk walked out of her home and out of her life the day of the round-up, Ferol missed the significance of the incident where he was concerned and promptly forgot it and him. Rusk went home that June. It was time. He had prolonged even his untimed visiting limit far beyond the usual bounds. At the time of his going Ferol was so engaged in her anxious thoughts of Mrs. Hill that she gave small though to Volney Rusk's disappearance without a word of farewell.

Ferol made up her mind quite suddenly to go to Mrs. Hill and have the whole thing over with—to know the worst fate which might befall her. As she dismounted in front of the Hill bungalow, Ferol observed with satisfaction that Henry Hill was in the chicken yard. Mrs. Hill met her at the door and welcomed her into the living room with

warm friendliness. Ferol looked about the room. She had heard others speak of the peace of Mrs. Hill's living room. It was long and walled with windows on the south side, whose sills were filled with flowering plants. White woodwork, white dotted swiss curtains, a green climbing vine mounting from its jar on the window ledge by the frill of the white curtain, to a foothold on the picture moulding, where it dangled its delicate green and feathery spray half way around the room from picture to picture. It finally came to apparent pause on the deer antlers over the fireplace. Ashes were white where an early morning fire had blazed under the red brick façade, and the white wooden shelf of the mantel piece held a slender vase of sweet peas on one side and nasturtiums in a round cut glass bowl on the other. A delicate silver smoking service flanked the tall slender vase. In every window grew the hardy geranium plants which during the winter filled the room with the warmth of their pink blossoms—geraniums which only Mrs. Hill could bring to such famous flowering. Maidenhair ferns trailed delicate fronds over the green sides of painted pots. Several rocking chairs were grouped about a large table near the windows, and a huge divan piled with pillows and an old broché shawl showed that Mrs. Hill had been lying down. A homelike calm impregnated the room as though the inanimate things were conscious of the love and

harmony of the life which had its existence there. Ferol felt the thrall of her surroundings but tried to throw it off with a resolute hardening of the heart. She sat looking into the fireplace as Mrs. Hill continued speaking, answering in monosyllables. As she sat there gazing blindly at the heap of white dust, not even trying to concentrate her mind upon what the older woman was saying, Ferol became aware gradually that Mrs. Hill was not taking advantage of her opportunities. She spoke no word of renewal, made no sign of recognition. A silence fell between them. Still Mrs. Hill made no move to speak first. Ferol realised that she did not intend to speak, that the act of renewal must come from herself.

"You do not remember me, Mrs. Hill," she spoke out of the pregnant silence.

"Yes, I remember you," answered Mrs. Hill gently and gravely.

Ferol sat erect as on that other day, looking straight into Mrs. Hill's eyes, her own steely and cold. In the beginning Mrs. Hill had been for her a peg on which to hang her aspirations. She regarded her now as a human being, and was struck by unexpected qualities of kindness and support which the older woman delicately offered by implication rather than by words. Her continued mercy in withholding the knowledge of Ferol's past history from the San Vincente crowd had amazed Ferol, who from the very first moment

of their second meeting on Fanny Hay's porch had been braced for attack. At first she had waited feverishly, then when no word was said to answer her suspicion, she had expected a surprise, a trap laid for her public humiliation. Perhaps Mrs. Hill intended to hold her knowledge as a threat, to use her under the whip of it. Even now she could not accept Mrs. Hill's silence as final and intentional. She had come to find out.

"What are you going to do?" she blurted out.

"Nothing," maintained Mrs. Hill calmly.

Ferol's heart gave a great leap. A flicker of consciousness stirred in her immature soul.

"Do you mean it?" she asked. "Do you mean to keep what I told you of Berry and me? You will not tell these other women?" Ferol leaned forward as she spoke and looked keenly into the other's face. Such forbearance suggested to her a nobility of character similar to a certain brigandish sense of honour, a clan loyalty of her own experience, yet much more. It presented a loyalty without the kinship of blood; it foreshadowed a perception of human sympathy in the awakening consciousness of Ferol Ward. Here was a woman who proposed to protect another woman.

Mrs. Hill put her hand upon Ferol's knee in a gesture of affection, protection even. "I will not

tell any one," she said. "Why should I betray your confidence?"

"Not even your husband?" persisted Ferol.

"Not even my husband," answered Mrs. Hill, withdrawing her hand, yet looking into the younger woman's face with a tender kindness which brought the refractory lump into Ferol's throat.

Ferol's acquaintance with shrewd Texas traders, the rude philosophy of frontier life, the struggle to hold her own in the business world, had given her a certain hard experience which precluded any expectation of forbearance or mercy in the social world. She had always expected to be hit hard herself, and to defend herself with similar hardihood. All the trite old saws and sayings numerously current in the talk of west Texas stood her in good stead as rules of life. Of sentimentality she had a scornful familiarity but for sentiment Ferol had no name. It represented to her certain choked and dimly defined feelings which she knew only to repress. These were the feelings now which swelled her heart until it ached. She got up and walked to the window, turning her back on Mrs. Hill to wipe away moisture from her eyes, to conceal the trembling of her lips. She stood looking at the hardy, green, growing plants in the sunshine. She did not know how to put this feeling in her heart into words.

"I reckon your geraniums are beautiful,—

when they bloom," she smiled a crooked little smile with the hesitating words.

But Mrs. Hill understood. She got up and came over to the girl, putting her arms about the slender shoulders, drawing Ferol around to face her. "You poor child," she said, "you have been suffering over that and I never guessed it." The tenderness in her voice, the sympathy of her words were more than Ferol could bear. She leaned her head on the other woman's shoulder and sobs shook her whole frame for a moment. But she soon controlled herself. She drew away, wiping the tears from her eyes, smiling through the mist. "I'm such a fool," she said.

Mrs. Hill patted her on the back and turned to the tea table. She began briskly to light the wick for the samovar, to move quick, slender hands among the teacups. "We shall have some tea," she said, "and talk this out between us. Nothing destroys a worry like a good frank talk."

When finally the tea was brewed and Mrs. Hill sat toying with her spoon, looking with beaming satisfaction upon Ferol Ward, she said whimsically, "But how I have wanted to call you Ferol! May I?" Ferol smiled radiantly back at her. Mrs. Hill continued:

"It seems to me we have known each other some time and so I must be allowed an older woman's privilege," she abandoned the whimsical tone and added gravely, "I want to tell you first that I

have great pride in knowing you. What you have told me in the past and what I have seen for myself in the present make me feel a respect for your courage and steadfastness. You have done well."

"I did not know what I was doing," protested Ferol with a pale smile. "I reckon I acted on instinct. I could not be so sure now."

"No, perhaps not, but you are no longer unknowing. You have come a long way since that day we had our talk down in west Texas."

"I have never forgotten a word that you said," answered Ferol, then paused with a quick, shamed recollection of her boastfulness and egotism. Her sense of power over "that man" had so weakened that she reckoned lightly enough now what she had bragged of to Mrs. Hill.

With flushed cheeks of embarrassment, she suddenly blurted out grimly, "I was so green, so raw, that I didn't know right from wrong. Nobody could believe that who hadn't been in Texas and known poor folks like mine. When I think of what I was then, I am like Wils Junior's old lady in the Mother Goose book, I can only wonder 'if this be I.' "

"You are even more than I foresaw in you and that was a great deal. You are a woman of charm, personality; so individual that you make a place for yourself. You have lost much that you did not need and gained a great deal that was

necessary to your development. To have such a selective gift argues that you can go far. Now that I have found you again, I shall never be willing to lose you. If I did not feel that you were so strong I should say, 'Come to me with your perplexities, your worries,' but you do not need me. You do not need any one. You are able to stand alone."

"I have to," said Ferol simply, unconsciously repeating herself.

From the moment when she grasped the full meaning of Mrs. Hill's generosity, this new rule of living,—the interdependence of women and the interchange of sympathy possible, Ferol Ward had a new motive in life. She sat figuratively at Mrs. Hill's feet in adoring study. She sought out the older woman persistently, drew her into expression as to her views of life with a naïve simplicity and frankness of intercourse which would not have been possible but for the secret they shared.

Mrs. Hill regarded with awe the awakening soul of Ferol Ward. In a measure she understood the younger woman's needs, strengthened Ferol's dim discernment into certainty, revealed to her moral beauty which painted the world anew. Ferol's original quaint ideas of honour, almost mediæval in their form of pure patriarchal survival, in which the woman was to be used, body and soul, for the benefit of the family, for the

furtherance of family ambition, met here a modern-enlightened, and more natural, view of woman's place in the world. The talks which Ferol and Mrs. Hill had during the long summer afternoons on the shaded galleries of Meadowlark, or in the peace of Mrs. Hill's white-souled living room, caused Ferol to recall frequently statements made in the women's meetings in New York which she had attended with Agnes Trevor.

Mrs. Hill also was reading along the lines of women's economics. Her strong and eager spirit leaped ahead to the time which she would never see, of freedom of thought and action for women. Conscious of the power of love, which was a living thing in the lives of herself and Henry Hill, she did not doubt the coming of the day when man and woman should stand on an equal footing before the law as before God and each other, when love would be given firmer place in the scheme of life.

CHAPTER XV

THE Bridge Club met on Thursday nights in San Vincente, all through the summer. There had been some talk of abandoning the meetings until autumn, but the function had too firm a hold upon the group, was too greatly enjoyed by its twenty members, to be foregone. The club was more social than sportsmanlike in its game and the hour after the playing was looked forward to with as much zest as the game itself.

The men gathered about the fireplace in Mrs. Hill's long room, smoking the fragrant cigars which Henry Hill had passed about. The women sat in groups, gossiping lightly, displaying pretty summer gowns. They had finished the strawberry shortcake supper for which Mrs. Hill's cook was famous, and were lingering in animated groups. A freedom of pose, a frankness of speech marked the cosmopolitan experience of these exiles in the west. Everything was discussed except the vital truth of their presence, the reason for being in San Vincente. This was taboo. Not only in the club was this matter of health avoided save as a subject for jest. If one among them were ill, very ill, they held together grimly and waited

without futile discussion, lending what aid was needed; when the subject of health had to be met and commented on, it was touched whimsically, lightly, with a magical deftness which lifted the shadow looming over them all.

"I'm not a parasite," Fanny Hay was heard to say in her high, sweet voice; "I cook three meals a day, entertain a husband, bring up a real boy, take care of one horse, hitch up the cart, go for the mail and still have time to enjoy life very much indeed."

"You are a survival of matriarchal days," retorted Gregory Worthington, turning from the group of men whose conversation had been arrested by Fanny's remarks.

"That's the idea that you get out of the book we've been reading," Julia Brace spoke, "that women originally had so much to do that they were contented."

"And now have so little to do that they are trying to get a chance to busy themselves with voting," Berry Ward interposed mockingly.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Pitney, the beautiful and intellectual,—wife of an army surgeon stationed at the Fort. "Women have become idle, parasitic and so unhappy. They must go back to activity in social and industrial life in order to give themselves a chance to develop into something better."

"They won't get it in politics," answered Cap-

tain Pitney with all the army man's scorn of political life. "Do you want them to develop into bosses?"

"Well, I'm a parasite," announced Julia Brace firmly, "and I'm glad of it. Somebody has to be rested and refreshed in order to enjoy the fruits of other people's toil. And that's my class. I know it and I accept its burdens."

The men laughed as she had intended they should at this sally. But Gregory looked at his wife with a masked anger kindled in the depths of his eyes. "You're the sort that caused the French revolution and the downfall of Rome," he growled.

"You flatter me, Greg, but some credit must be given for those events to a Louis or two and a Nero," responded Julia sweetly.

"But I think the woman movement is much deeper than the mere matter of voting," interposed Mrs. Hill pacifically.

"Well, why not let the women vote?" asked Mr. Hill mildly.

"That's what I say," agreed Jimmy Wagstaff. "Let 'em vote. They'll get jolly well sick of the muck just as decent men have."

"That is the point exactly," commented Mrs. Pitney swiftly. "If men of the better class would feel their duty and power in politics as a responsibility, it might not be necessary for women to bother with the vote. They could vote when oc-

casion arose, when some matter concerning children or social welfare was up, but give their time and attention to other matters. I think women should have work to do as men have. For instance, their own professions or businesses and not abandon them for marriage, but just keep on as the men do."

"Oh, that would be simply diabolical!" cried Julia Brace. "I shouldn't have time to ride or hunt or fish."

Gregory Worthington turned away from the scene of discussion impatiently. He addressed himself to Ferol Ward, who sat on the divan listening intently.

"What do you think, Mrs. Ward?" he asked; "do you want the vote?"

"I don't know what I want," answered Ferol. "I want to be myself."

"Well, you can't very well get away from that," commented Greg brightly, "and nobody wants you to." He lowered his voice for her ear alone. "Just being yourself is about the most satisfactory accomplishment I know of."

Ferol looked at him inscrutably. "Do you think I am myself?" she asked.

"I hope you haven't a dual nature," Greg protested anxiously.

"Men don't seem to get below the surface," Ferol replied briefly and somewhat enigmatically.

"Perhaps you don't give 'em a chance," re-

plied Gregory Worthington with an edge of meaning in his voice.

Ferol got up and paused a moment before following the other women to the room where their wraps had been left.

"I'd like to know a man once who'd treat me as an equal," she said, then passed out of the room, following the others. Gregory stood looking after her as though perplexed. Jimmy Wagstaff approached with a wicked smile upon his countenance.

"Mrs. Berry gives you to think, eh, Greg?" he observed. Before the other could reply, he continued. "She has the highest instep and the highest forehead of any woman I have ever known. It is a dangerous combination."

This and succeeding conversations caused Ferol to write to Agnes Trevor for all the latest and best books on the woman movement. With the others Agnes sent a small, shabby old volume, which, in stained covers and pages clinging together, evidenced age and lack of use. It was John Stuart Mill's "Subjection of Women." In this book Ferol found in plain and simple words which she could understand all that was essential to knowledge of the position of women. A man had written the whole truth so long ago that people had almost forgotten that such a book existed. Ferol studied this book. She read the others, too, and discussed them with Mrs. Hill or Mrs.

Pitney. Ellen Key, Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis were consumed in turn. She began vaguely to feel stirring a desire to espouse openly the cause of women, but her environment did not offer an outlet of this sort. The women in San Vincente were absorbed more or less profoundly in some form of the health question, and the men would not take the matter seriously even for a half hour's discussion. There was no need to get up and howl about women, she told herself humorously, where there was no one to listen.

More often than ever Ferol now found herself alone. Berry went continually to the Worthington's for amusement. The Hills with a party of friends had gone down into another part of New Mexico on a visit. Ferol was conscious of a growing lack in her life, of an increasing and compelling need, which drove her restlessly from one occupation to another, yet could not be put into words.

It came the nearest to being gratified by swift descent and capture of Wils Junior, when she would bear him away home and keep him to herself for a whole day. They were great companions. Ferol herself was simple and natural as a child, and young enough to enter into Wils Junior's amusements with zest and absorption. When he permitted himself a rare mood of affection, Ferol would take him in her arms and rub her cheek hungrily against his. He was so sweet in these

moments of childish abandon that she felt a desire to crush him to her, to hold him close so that he could never get away. But Wils' moments of affectionate demonstration ended in quick flight when the response hinted emotion. He was very much the boy.

For a while Ferol considered sending for one of her small sisters or, perhaps, the kid. This last idea brought a clutch at her heart. How happy she would be to see the kid once more. But at the same time she put the thought from her. Berry would be vexed by the boy's presence. She knew that instinctively,—jealous perhaps of her love for the kid or annoyed by the stir of youth in the house. Reluctantly, poignantly, Ferol abandoned these thoughts. Then—if only she might have a child of her own!

Ferol was living upon husks, knowing that on every hand was richer food for the soul. If Berry had shown the depths of his feeling for her; if he had revealed the fact that his own longings were similar to her own, a bond might have been welded between them at this time which later on would have withstood the pressure of stronger influences. But Berry's wisdom was not of the constructive sort. He was much less conscious than Ferol of the impending crisis in their relations.

Times were when the usually reticent Ferol longed to talk—when she yearned to unburden

herself of the weight of her reserve. Some moment of unexpected expansive glow made her tongue quiver to give way to her tightly bound emotions. She would look at Berry strangely, perhaps venture a word or two, testing his receptivity, essaying to let down the bars of her impassive habit. But Berry did not divine the words bubbling at lip edge; did not fathom what lay deep in the sudden sparkling eagerness of Ferol's changeful eyes. A sign from him; a question; some reference to her home people; a word to recall the past, would have set free the pathway of confidences. Berry did not speak the word. He remained unaware even of her need. And there was no one else to whom she could talk. Mrs. Hill had opened up a field for gleaning knowledge, for exchange of ideas, but they rarely touched in their talks the poignant memories of west Texas. Mrs. Hill had never seen the kid or her mother; but Berry had.

To a strongly reticent nature the necessity for breaking down the bars of reserve comes with greater insistence than garrulity ever knows. Crisp October days brought relief to Ferol's fagged and restless spirit. When the men came in from the usual autumn hunt, Berry suggested a visit to New York. Perhaps a distaste for the habits of the weeks preceding the hunt made him anxious to continue the break long enough to end

the intimacy which he had begun with Julia Brace. Let her find a new diversion in his absence,—frankly, Berry was bored by his persistent companion.

CHAPTER XVI

AUTUMN found them in New York. Ferol re-entered the life of the great city with eager zest. She continued her study of the woman movement, and with Agnes Trevor attended the various lectures, meetings and talks of those well informed and active in suffrage work. Men too were beginning to take an interest in such meetings. On every side Ferol met a more enlightened and respectful attitude of men toward the movement, especially among the writers and painters who frequented the Ward house. Even Mrs. Ward seemed less set against the subject.

Agnes had quietly and steadily put herself to the task of dissipating the antagonistic atmosphere of her mother's home, of setting in motion a current of response to the new thought of the day which she hoped eventually would assume actual harmony with the surroundings. It was not without annoyance that Mrs. Ward found herself obliged to face complete opposition in thought among those with whom she desired to surround herself. If she wished to continue to be a force among these people who represented the best of the intellectuals of the country, she

must accept at least with toleration the persistence of the new outlook.

Not only was the matter of suffrage one which had undergone a complete reversal in the passing years. The subject of housing the poor, caring for the sick, assisting the unfortunate,—all had passed from a matter of charity work into a deeper study of preventive measures. One did not help the poor nowadays, Mrs. Ward admitted ruefully—one tried instead to prevent conditions which brought about poverty. The whole subject of social welfare was assuming a more scientific basis, and the women were setting themselves to the task of righting evils which in the past they would not have mentioned had they known them to exist. The change came upon Mrs. Ward so swiftly that she was bewildered and at first inclined to resentment. But the selective force and unswerving determination, the salient characteristics which had given her the certain power and prestige which she held among these successful workers, came to her aid now and helped her to bridge the chasm between the past and the future.

Ferol felt this change on entering into the life of the home and was grateful for the absence of that antagonism which she had known to exist before. She and Agnes went openly to the suffrage meetings and came home to report their workings to Mrs. Ward. Ferol had a way of relating the experiences with a few graphic words

which intrigued the entire family. Even Berry came to accept the change without annoyance. He still found Ferol the most attractive woman he had ever known, and once removed from the somewhat strained atmosphere of the last few weeks in San Vincente, their relations were more cordial. He did not miss Julia Brace at all, was, in fact, rather glad to be rid of her importunities which kept him occupied over trifles. He was in excellent health, better than usual for him, and able to enjoy many interests which for some years had been put aside completely.

After an unusually enthusiastic meeting of one of the suffrage bodies, Ferol and Agnes were seated in Mrs. Trevor's boudoir, having a cup of tea as they lingered in the luxury of negligee, giving themselves an hour of relaxation before dressing for dinner.

Agnes wrinkled her white brow meditatively as she gazed absently into her surroundings. She was going over in her mind the points of the afternoon meeting. She roused herself to say dully, "I wish they wouldn't be so flamboyantly sure of themselves." Ferol understood her.

"They are rather hard on men," she agreed.

"I don't like this feeling of antagonism which they show. It means arousing the men in return. Sex antagonism is such a waste of force. Did you notice how that woman from Chicago said again and again, 'And who are to blame for this con-

dition? Men. Who are responsible for these unjust laws? Men.' We don't accomplish anything by that kind of talk, except to create ill feeling. I am not at all sure, myself, that men are to blame for all of these things. Women themselves have been culpably indifferent."

Ferol nestled down in the pillows of the chaise longue. "Blame it on the dog," she admitted with cheerful vulgarity. Then she spoke seriously with a touch of scorn. "Men are not to blame for everything, Agnes. Anybody knows that. The truth is that women are about as good as men are, and as bad."

"But don't you think women show any effect of their lifelong subjection?" questioned Agnes. Agnes Trevor had not known through experience the meaning of subjection, but Ferol had. She was able to look back on conditions existing in her own family and common among her neighbours, with a reconstructed comprehension. Ferol knew the women who accepted subjection, who even went so far as to defend it fiercely through a mistaken sense of loyalty. She sat up among the pillows and began to speak slowly, thoughtfully, her mind searching the past.

"I've read somewhere that subjection has taught women to govern by indirection. I believe that is true. Do you know what I think about all this talk of women's virtues?" she asked, and answered herself. "It is not true.

That is all. It is not true. Women have had the part thrust upon them for so long that they have come to accept themselves as paragons. But do you suppose any normal, natural woman has not at times, utterly lawless instincts and even criminal desires? Why not? How can you tell what is in the mind of the woman who sits next to you? Do you believe her thoughts are always as pure and soulful as she pretends? She lies even to herself. Women are made that way as well as men. A woman who hates her husband may care for him through an illness and pray that he will live, when before she had been wishing he would die. The woman does not live who is not capable of such inconsistency. It parallels man's. A woman is fully able to conceal her real nature from her husband during a long life together. What woman has not had dreams of lovers? What man has not realized those dreams?"

Ferol sat erect in her access of enthusiasm. She thrust the silken draperies back from her slender, strong, young arms with an impatient gesture and stood up. The tawny hair falling about her face, her grey eyes gleaming with darkened pupils, she stood like a prophetess of old. As though seeking to free herself of fetters, invisible ties, she threw out her arms impatiently as she continued speaking.

"Women are not good because they are women. If they are as pure and fine as the world demands

it is because of their development as individuals to meet that requirement. Perhaps some day it will be admitted that such development carried to an extreme is unmoral; that woman should be less conscious of her soul and more aware of her sex. At any rate the first step in advance for the woman movement should be by the path of honesty and frankness.

"It is a great issue, this of woman's development. Women should meet it in a large way. Let them cease to lie about themselves. Let them look upon themselves as human beings with physical needs such as men have; to accept these requirements as comprehendingly as those of the spirit. The perfect woman will be one with soul and heart and body equally developed. She will make her demands and the world will be better for her frankness. Then woman's perfectly balanced purity will have significance. It will be rooted in knowledge, nurtured in self-control and lofty aspiration. To meet this ideal man will have to reconstruct his own standards. His thoughts will grow finer, he will live truer to ideals, develop fortitude; purify himself to meet this woman who is to answer his every need. Man and woman will face each other as equals, as human beings on the same plane of knowledge, of experience, of sympathies, with all the vainglorious boastings as to the superiority of either,

forgotten. With mutual respect and confidence, together in wise judgment, they will test the value of new ideals. Each will dare to think aloud. To bring about this rational standard woman must take the first step forward. Let her take it fearlessly, frankly, but aware."

Standing upon the Persian prayer rug, draped in russet-coloured soft silk, her slender figure tense and dramatic; using her bare arms occasionally in swift controlled gestures, Ferol had created a vivid picture. She had forgotten her audience of one. Her voice had gradually acquired the depth and resonance of the orator. She dropped her hands to her sides, sank down weakly and looked into Agnes Trevor's tense face. Agnes sat spellbound. Ferol was as amazed as Agnes at her sudden outburst of speech, and somewhat ashamed. She regarded her sister-in-law anxiously.

"Ferol, what a gift you have!" Agnes exclaimed. She looked at Ferol intently like a bird fascinated. Suddenly she sat up with clenched hands and eager eyes. "Ferol, you must speak at the next meeting. Yes, yes," she continued hastily. "You must. They need you. Say just what you have said to me. Say it all. It will do them good."

Ferol sat staring at Agnes. A response to this call urged determinedly in her heart. She wanted to speak. She felt her own power. For a mo-

ment she thought of Berry. What would be his attitude toward such an unexpected and radical move? He would not like it. Perhaps he would never know. She would not feel herself bound to tell him. So long as her utterances in no way reflected upon him he had no right to hamper her. Ferol's mind had freed itself of many fetters during these months of study.

Perhaps Agnes divined this momentary questioning. She ceased to urge but sat expectantly. Ferol was not one to ask advice,—she would decide this alone. A moment's swift feeling of pity for her brother swept through Agnes Trevor's mind. Berry's determined will and strong individuality had met their match in Ferol. Young as she was, untaught and unlettered, Ferol Ward represented a force to be reckoned with. In this gift of Ferol's, Agnes Trevor felt that she had made a real discovery.

"I will do it." Ferol sat up with a sudden energy. "You are not to speak of it beforehand to any but the chairman, so that there will not be a crowd of the curious to see me fail. Fail,—" she repeated, "I will not fail, Agnes, unless I get stage fright. Do you think I shall?"

From this obscure happening in the boudoir of Agnes Trevor was born an event which gave Ferol new poise. When the day for the meeting came, the following week, she went with Agnes to the meeting place with apparent self-possession

but with palpitating heart. As the chairman announced that Mrs. Berwin Ward would give a short talk on the subject of, "Woman, Herself," Ferol felt her knees trembling. With trepidation, she approached the front of the raised platform where it was customary for the speakers to stand. She stood for one helpless moment facing the sea of faces; it came toward her and receded like waves, to her sensitive consciousness.

The audience looked at her curiously and critically. Her clinging soft silk gown was the colour of autumn leaves; a heavy strand of encrusted gold beads hung about her neck and rested upon her bosom. The small head covered with rusty, waving hair was poised delicately above the gleaming white throat. The youth and delicacy of her got to the audience in that subtle way which every public speaker knows to his own discomfiture or joy. A sudden wave of lightly clapping hands, then silence fell upon the waiting people.

Ferol began to speak in that low rich tone which attracted attention at all times.

The perfect self-control which was her habit asserted itself at once, and she made telling use of the few graceful gestures which she used. She did not raise her voice at any time, but occasionally sank it to a lower note. In passages of emotional intensity that undertone rose and fell with the swell of organ tones, always controlled under the tranquil surface of her speech. What she said

was clear and concise. She had had time to think out her points, to eliminate the obvious and unnecessary. She spoke with a ruthless biting logic which bared the weaknesses of women as a surgeon cuts with the knife. What she said was not so much an attack upon women as a revelation of the feminine character. Empowered with assurance by her own freely developed individuality, Ferol made a determined effort to break through the network of egotism and blindness in which women have entangled themselves—an appeal to the best qualities of woman's nature to overcome the worst. She asked for honesty and frankness; invited women to study themselves before attempting to set in order the affairs of the world, and to compare themselves with men on the basis of the humanity of both. Ferol carried her audience with her as responsive as a harp touched by skilled fingers. She made them laugh at the absurdity of woman's conception of herself and weep swift passing tears at the real pathos of woman's position, as unaware of herself as a blind kitten. She made a plea for self-analysis, which was a stern command; followed with a bright foreshadowing of woman's place beside man's in a world of equal purpose and desire. When she ceased to speak there was a moment's breathless pause, then applause. Ferol and Agnes slipped out of a rear door, away from the

eager pressure of hands, the flattery of women keyed to emotional pitch.

The morning papers came out with the speech in full, with a glowing tribute to Mrs. Berwin Ward's gift of eloquence, with her rational and sane handling of the question which was the topic of the day and hour. On every side she was complimented for having stemmed the tide of irrational abuse of men which had threatened to become a fetich with women struggling for the vote or for some other form of power which would enable them to have the rights of a human being. On the whole, Ferol's first attempt at public utterance met with overwhelming success.

Berry Ward read the newspaper comment with white lips and reddened eyes, while Ferol sat wordless, Agnes Trevor beside her, determined to make a stand if need be against her brother's wrath. They were in Ferol and Berry's sitting room, where the family had gathered in some excitement over the papers. Mrs. Ward faced the publicity amazingly well and congratulated Ferol upon her success. Mr. Ward's smile had been wry as he and Mrs. Ward went out of the room, after some lively comment, but Ferol's power to fascinate had exerted itself too completely upon him to give edge to his laughing protests to all the talk and noise.

Ferol waited while Berry went over the pages which she had put before him marked. She did

not shrink from the frankness which she advocated for other women. As soon as she realised that the matter had become public property she laid all of it at Berry's hand.

When he had finished reading, he got up and started to the door. He would not look at Ferol. He did not answer Agnes as she begged him to stop to let her explain. He went out of the house. In an hour he had returned. Infuriated by the congratulation and jovial comment at his club, he returned to the house with teeth on edge. What passed between him and Ferol Agnes never knew. Both emerged from their rooms in travelling dress, grim and silent.

Agnes made a swift movement of protest, which Ferol met with a negative gesture. "Don't," she whispered; "we had better go. I can't go on with it. There is only one thing to do, and I am willing to go."

"You will never forgive him for this," protested Agnes tearfully.

But Ferol was calm, dry-eyed. "Yes, I shall," she said; "Berry has been good to me."

CHAPTER XVII

FEROL had gone back to San Vincente in a high spirit of self-sacrifice. The glow of her mood was promptly cooled by Berry's outrageous behaviour. Whether to punish Ferol for her indiscretion in New York or to salve the hurt to his pride by forgetfulness, he threw himself into the pursuit of Julia Brace with an ardour hitherto unexpressed. The follies of the pair became a topic of interest about town. They spent long days together in the hills riding out to the top of the divide and losing themselves in the juniper woods, following faint old trails into strange draws, exploring abandoned mining claims. Mellow autumn days were these, drunk with the dry and sparkling air like wine, powdered with dust of gold from the sun, touched by the occasional flare of cottonwood foliage, yellow, yellow,—days full of daze and ache at heart, the unfailing brush on the shoulder of the sadness of the year.

In December these excursions were checked by storms, then an indisposition which kept Berry Ward close for a fortnight. Ferol welcomed the attack. It gave Berry back to her again. Despite

his bearish, convalescent disposition, Ferol was well pleased. But January came upon them in the way it has in the high country,—warm, clear days, cold, frosty nights; not a cloud in the sky; days designed to recall the dying to life, to put fresh courage in the hearts of all. Berry drove his car at a reckless pace along the mountain roads, speeding home in the way in which Julia Brace delighted. The winter was an unusually open one, few rains, fewer snows; it gave Berry and Julia Brace exceptional opportunity to continue their affair. It was not so much what the pair did,—that was obvious and unconcealed. But they had a way of flaunting their desire for each other's companionship with the utmost nonchalance, in the face of the whole town.

Mrs. Hill and Fanny Hay drove in through the iron gateway of Los Mirlos one morning, to call for some squabs which Greg had ready for Captain Hay's fitful appetite. They did not get out of the cart, but sat talking to Greg. The weather was still cold, but there were hints of spring in the air, in the slightly swelling buds of the trees which the hot sunshine of midday urged, and the frosty nights rebuked. The winter rains had passed. Above in the stark trees the black birds bugled and swept hither and thither in swift flocks like leaves before a gust of wind. Meadowlarks were piping down at the garden edge, a jubilant

note in their cry, an exultation as of one who has found first the secret arrival of the spring.

Julia Brace came out in response to the message Greg had sent. She was dressed for riding. She came toward the cart and stood beside it facing Greg from the opposite side. At the same moment Berry drove into the grounds, waved a greeting and dismounted at some distance to fasten his horse to a post. Greg walked around the cart, trying to encounter Julia, who moved slowly, with gait timed to keep pace with his own, in the same direction. She was laughing slyly, talking to the two women as she moved. After making several attempts to come close to his wife and failing, Greg abandoned the pursuit with a scowl and went away toward the barns.

Julia Brace giggled. "Oh, I'm so afraid of Greg," she whispered; "he is so cross with me. I am so afraid of him!" The glee with which she expressed this feeling denied her fear. Before either of the two women could reply, Berry approached within hearing. He and Julia Brace were riding out to the Kneeling Sister to take a book which Julia had promised to Mrs. Nelson, wife of the manager of the copper mine. It was an all day ride, there and back.

As Mrs. Hill and Fanny Hay drove away, both were silent for a while. Then Mrs. Hill spoke with apparent effort. "I wish Julia Brace wouldn't be so foolish," she said.

Fanny Hay responded lightly. "Oh, there's no harm in Julia. She always has to have some man nibblin' her ears." Mrs. Hill smiled at the illustration and spoke with some relief.

"I'm glad you think so. Julia, after all, is only a spoiled child. But it is of Ferol I am thinking."

"Ferol is a thoroughbred," answered Fanny Hay, less lightly, revealing a more serious concern. "She will keep her head and hold her tongue, too. Berry is only showing his resentment for Ferol's success in New York. There's a cruel streak in Berry. He is an Oriental at heart. He'd like to lock Ferol up and carry the key about in his pocket, at the same time doing exactly as he pleased."

"He's afraid of Ferol's gifts, I believe," replied Mrs. Hill, "afraid that some day she will find them better worth while than himself."

"He has a strange way of holding her," commented Fanny Hay dryly.

But Ferol herself was wiser than either Mrs. Hill or Fanny Hay. Knowing Berry's peculiar temperament, she recognised this pursuit of Julia Brace as only another form of the black moods, which she had learned not to combat but to ignore. Berry was temporarily mad; she would bear with him accordingly. She did not lose courage to pass off the craze as an amusing game between Berry and Julia, and shared in a measure by herself.

She kept ever before herself the impermanence of the mood. As Fanny Hay had pointed out, Ferol did not lose her head. She thrust aside the biting tang of her New York fling,—a success which called her through letters with requests to speak, packages of clippings which Agnes Trevor had not the heart to refrain from sending, believing that Ferol might have at least the fruits of her talent.

These printed words aroused conflicting and at times tumultuous emotions in Ferol. She felt like one who had forgiven a great injury only to receive a slap for her pains. Loneliness and terror filled her heart. Life had assumed the aspect of a great monster which continually bruised and beat her with its carelessly lashing tail. Instead of which she craved affection, craved clinging arms, tender, caressing fingers; above all an atmosphere of love and trust which would ease the ache at her breast. Her heart was empty. She had lost everything that it ever had contained—her mother, the kid, the little girls, her worthless old Daddy, all precious cares, sweet burdens compared to the void with which her heart now swelled. They had all moved from the warm place where she had held them dear, abandoned her for pay. She was the price of their assured, comfortable living which she knew was so precious to their ease-loving habit of life. She herself yearned at times for the old slipshod existence.

She felt tired of trying to reach her ideal, tired of urging herself up the ladder of knowledge. She had climbed—a long way. Only to leave behind what she most valued, what made life dear.

Berry had given Ferol back her pride; had made for her a place; had put the substantial props under her family which somehow had changed to barriers and become insurmountable; and having secured her thus, he had abandoned her for the pursuit of a bright butterfly.

Times were when Ferol thought in her bitterness of retaliation. Volney Rusk's moment of forgetfulness returned to her mind with fresh meaning. A careless word to the Worthingtons, a line from herself would recall Volney. She too could play with fire, and no one knew so well as Ferol how quickly a counter affair on her part would recall Berry to his senses; bring him storming home to protect his own fireside. But the memory of Volney Rusk's dark, reddened face, his misty great dark eyes, the touch of his face against her knee, sent a chill of revulsion through Ferol's veins. This way was impossible. Volney Rusk could not be a friend to her; his type and temperament destined him to be a lover or nothing. Ferol could not tolerate Volney Rusk even in thought as a lover.

Gregory Worthington offered a solution closer at hand. Greg admired Ferol tremendously; he had more than once revealed to her

his strong attraction. During the winter Greg had formed the habit of riding over to Meadowlark to keep up appearances as well as to receive comfort and reassurance at Ferol's hands. They rarely spoke of Julia or Berry. Gregory brought the problems of the farm in which Ferol always had shown an interest. Some days in an expansive mood he talked of his travels so entertainingly as to absorb Ferol's attention.

Greg had begun to dwell upon Ferol's charms. From the first day of seeing her he had been drawn by her beauty and personality. Up to this time Greg's very real devotion to his wife, and absorption in her whims and caprices had kept him well occupied. Freed by his resentment of Julia's defection, he now permitted himself to observe the quivering play of Ferol's lips, the surge and ebb of colour in her cheeks, the white fineness of her skin. More than once he longed to snatch her close in his arms and to find oblivion or at least balm. But he could not give himself free rein. The integrity of Gregory Worthington's character; the iron habit of self-control; the poise of his mature years, kept him in bounds. So he stared at Ferol with unhappy eyes.

His friendship, his very presence finally became an annoyance to Ferol. Neither Volney Rusk nor Gregory were to be endured even as pawns. Ferol was unable to play the game. The thought of such a trick shamed her.

But something must happen she thought to free them all from this frightful strain; this life with something overshadowing, some impending disaster—this wretched round of drives, parties, rides, dinners. What was it all for? Life had been better worth while in Mrs. Tarver's garret room, brushing her single shiny blue skirt, washing out the coarse underwear in the late night hours, down in the boarding house kitchen, after the cook had gone to bed, ironing a shirtwaist. How she had struggled to be trim and neat. And now she was still struggling, although against another foe than poverty.

Days when Berry had gone out on horseback, Ferol drove the car into town, made calls, threw herself into social duties and occupations and became more gregarious than was her habit. She was driving to town to attend a large Bridge party one afternoon. Berry had lounged silent and fierce-browed about the house all morning. He did not offer to drive her to town as she delayed about the living room, slipping on the linen coat to protect her pretty frock from the dust. She lingered over her gauntlets as she drew them on, delayed cranking the car until the last moment, hoping that Berry might offer to go in with her and spend the afternoon with Wils Hay or Jimmy Wagstaff. Jimmy had a guest who was an old acquaintance of Berry Ward. Surely, Ferol thought, he would go in to see James Sanger.

But no. Ferol got into the car, threw in the clutch, and the machine purred off down the curving road among the cedar trees.

As she emerged into the Fort road and swiftly passed over the bare white hills, dusted by powdered stone ground under by the passing wheels, Ferol glanced across the flat. From this point she could see the trees of Los Mirlos, the road thereto marked sharply like a blue print drawing, one of many cross roads cutting the arroyo from the Fort road to the Arroyo road, two main travelled highways. She could see a figure on horseback crossing the arroyo from the road to Los Mirlos. It looked like Julia Brace, but surely, thought Ferol, Julia Brace would be on her way to the party, and not on horseback. She slowed up and stared across anxiously as she came down the hill. With sudden purpose she timed her pace so as to pass within complete view of the person coming along the other road. As she approached this point of vantage where the two roads met and blended into one to cross the bridge to town, Ferol did not look to see who the rider was. Instead she kept her face turned toward town, but sat erect in order to make her figure unmistakable to the observer. As she crossed the bridge, Ferol gave one swift glance backward. It was Julia Brace. She was riding now upon the Fort road, mounting slowly the white rocked hill.

Ferol's lips bore a hard smile. She drove on

to the postoffice, got the mail and turned the car toward the bridge again, her mind active. She did not cross the bridge. Instead she drove to the Hill bungalow, walked in at the open door. No one was at home. Henry Hill no doubt had driven to the party with his wife. The maid was not visible. Wide-open doors and undisturbed houses were the custom in San Vincente. Ferol came back to the telephone and called up the house where the party was in progress. She excused herself on the plea of a sudden headache. She stood for a moment on the wide porch looking out across the flat toward the white spot of rocks which marked the hill on the Fort road. She was certain of the annoyance of her hostess over the lame excuse. It was to be a very large party; every one in town who played Bridge had been invited. Substitutes would be hard to find. Ferol went down the steps. She set the car to speeding toward Meadowlark.

A wholesome rage was stirring in Ferol's thoughts against Julia Brace, but it did not obscure her judgment or detract from her calm purpose. At last the time had come to act. She was as certain as could be that Julia Brace was on her way to Meadowlark. Perhaps the two had planned to ride together. Well, she could ride too; a ride had been known to help a headache. If they elected to spend the afternoon within doors, so would she. Ferol was grim and determined

but she did not like the part she had to play. If Julia Brace was going to risk the sort of talk which this escapade would cause, she herself was not. That was final. Julia's absence from the party would be remarked. Many persons might have seen her on the Fort road on horseback at an hour when she was expected at the party. Others would see her going home. If Berry went with her, all the more talk. Ferol speeded on.

The car passed into the curved driveway and up to the door with swift precision and noiseless stop. Ferol went into the hall. At the other end, in front of the glass doors which led into the living room, the heavy curtains were still drawn, the doors wide, as she had left them. Ferol thrust an arm through the curtains and went in.

CHAPTER XVIII

FEROL stopped astonished on the threshold. Berry and Julia Brace were standing before the fireplace, clasped in each other's arms. They stood swaying slightly as though drunk with contact of lips, absorbed in a long embrace. No sound betrayed Ferol's presence, but it was sensed by Berry Ward. He looked up to encounter Ferol's stormy eyes. At once Julia Brace's figure relaxed from his hold. She turned and saw Ferol looking at them with burning angry eyes paramount in a white still face. Ferol dropped her hold upon the curtain, let it fall behind her. She came in and stood confronting the wordless, stricken pair, Berry flushed and annoyed, hesitating for words, Julia Brace adjusting her rumpled hair with trembling fingers, her dark eyes blazing, her cheeks crimson.

Ferol advanced toward them with a terrible calm. She did not ignore anything, the sooty stray locks of Julia Brace's hair hanging in front of her eyes, Berry's gathering wrath and congested eyeballs. No feature of their confusion appeared to escape her observing eye. She looked them over dispassionately, coolly, her own fires

masked now inscrutably. "Reckon I came just in time," she drawled in mellow tones.

Berry's rage leaped to meet hers at the first glance, and her swift change to impassivity met the check of his second thought. "The party seems not to have lasted long," he sneered. Ferol turned a flinty look upon Julia Brace, ignoring Berry's remarks.

"This won't get you anywhere, Julia," she said evenly, "not even with Berry. And right down in the bottom of your heart you wouldn't give one of Greg's little fingers for both of Berry's arms. Better drop it."

Julia Brace looked from Ferol to Berry in passionate anger and amazement that she should find herself in such a position. If rage could have slain, gladly she would have destroyed them both with the keen edge of her hate. White-lipped, with nostrils quivering and tears gathering in her bewildered eyes, Julia Brace turned upon Berry Ward.

"Get my horse," she commanded in a choking voice.

Berry had recovered his poise and stood imperturbable; his sneering smile and hard eyes included them both. His fingers were active with rolling a cigarette. As he lighted it and tweaked the match into the fireplace, Berry laughed aloud. He went out, leaving the two women with a silence between more deafening than thunder. The

roar of it was in Julia Brace's ears as she slowly walked toward the door. She could scarcely see for the tears filling her eyes. As she passed near Ferol Ward, in a low tone in which all her fury was concentrated, she exclaimed, "You are the crudest thing I have ever known!"

She went out between the heavy curtains. Ferol looked after her blankly, felt her knees grow weak. She dropped into a chair and sat staring. Her anger was gone, she felt humiliated, crushed. The unexpected end had come.

Julia Brace refused Berry's request to wait while he got his horse to accompany her home. Without a look at him or a word further, she put her horse to a gallop and was gone. Berry stood for a moment, looking after her down the road, then he laughed once more, mirthlessly, and went into the house. He went directly to the living room and sat down opposite Ferol in a large leather chair. He began to roll a cigarette. Only the flickering of his fingers betrayed his nervousness.

Ferol did not speak. She sat with brooding glance directed toward the dying wood embers in the fireplace. Berry himself began to review the course of events leading up to the equivocal position in which Ferol had found him. For him, Julia Brace had been always a game, a plaything out of which he derived fitful and more or less compelling amusement. When he had decided

suddenly to go east in the autumn, it was because Berry had grown weary of the situation, resolved to end it; but returning to San Vincente, vexed with Ferol's sudden accession to public honours, stung by the fear that he might be on the verge of losing her, he had drifted into the succeeding days of madness with the deliberation of an opium-eater. Berry had wanted to be lulled to forgetfulness, or aroused to hope out of the black depths of his despondency. Julia Brace had offered such opportunity.

Berry rather enjoyed at first the stir their pranks created. It was intense in the nostrils of Julia Brace, but it gave her a headiness like rich old wine. No more than Berry did she desire a scandal, but she skirted the possibility like a child with a dare. Berry's mocking devotion lured her through its very uncertainty until she was determined to sweep him off his feet; to compel him to a moment's self-forgetfulness. She had won.

Berry's deep love for Ferol had kept him from the danger of careless embrace. He had not attempted to make love to Julia Brace; he had no desire to. With perfect understanding he grasped Julia Brace's point of view. It was a game to her, also. Less than the dust was he to Julia Brace, but her vanity drove her to extract from him, too, the balm of devotion.

In their long, uninterrupted hours together, they had played like children with the game of

flirtation; to provoke, to pique, to compel on her part; to urge, to press forward and to withdraw on his. From the beginning they were aware of the talk which their companionship provoked, and the knowledge lured them to mad and absurd extravagances of conduct over which they laughed and chatted. Always in the open air, riding, driving, both in full enjoyment of the active exercise and diverting surroundings, there had been little place, with such mutual indifference, for the growth of passion.

As the game had progressed, Gregory Worthington's surly annoyance added to Julia's zest in the affair. She loved to bait this great man, whom she believed to be utterly her own. She had exasperated and defied him at every turn, in her heart sure of his confidence. Stormy scenes had occurred between them, which made her feel herself to be the heroine of a stirring drama. Of course in time Gregory would master her, reduce her to submission. She would enjoy that, too.

It was after a scene of such nature between herself and Gregory that Julia Brace had mounted her horse and left Los Mirlos in a rage. She had forgotten the Bridge party which she had expected to attend. Her horse struck across the flats without conscious direction from Julia's hand. As she rode on, brooding over the scene which had passed and in which she was gratified to recall herself such a powerful factor,

she became aware of Ferol's passing in the car. For a moment she thought to call to her; then she noticed that Berry was not in the car. Where was he? Perhaps he would join her and help to kill the canker of shame which threatened to spoil her afternoon. The glory of her part in this affair could not wrap Julia completely from the sting of it. Still forgetful of the Bridge party and stimulated by the thought of Berry's power to amuse her, she had turned her horse into the road to Meadowlark. The Mexican servant had taken her horse at the door and led it into the corral out of the way of incoming vehicles. As elsewhere in the health homes of San Vincente, the doors of Meadowlark were open wide most days of the year. Julia walked straight in through the hall, parted the curtains of the living room with one small brown hand and called softly, "May I come in?"

Berry was sitting in his favourite chair reading. At the sound of the familiar voice he had smothered a "damn" and got on his feet to greet her. She came toward him with the bright eyes and winning smile of a child bent on mischief. She peered about dramatically. "What," she whispered, "alone at last?" Then she dropped the theatrical manner and came on toward Berry with the same provocative, sugary smile. She came close deliberately and lifted her childish

face to meet his downward gaze. She was absurdly small.

"I've been scolded," she announced; "I'm all hurt and pitiful. I want to be comforted and kissed and——"

Berry caught the excitement hidden behind her words. He felt a quick uprush of desire to seize her violently, to kiss her a great deal and then to shake her. She was a very bad, a very sweet little girl, indeed. But he was in no mind to be the victim of her baiting. He had hoped for a quiet afternoon alone. He was sick of himself, sick of her. Berry longed to give up this silly chase and to resume the peace of Ferol's affection. He was a little ashamed of the part he had played in New York, now that the danger was safely past. Of course Ferol would never dream of abandoning him for the career of a public speaker. He knew that ambition alone could not lure her from her place at his side. And now he longed to take his wife in his arms, to rest his lips on hers in a tender melting kiss, to see a return of the curving, answering smile of her affection and confidence. Instead, here was Julia Brace with her seven devils.

Berry looked down at his small, provocative tormentor and said, "Bad Little Devil!"

This small name delighted Julia Brace. It made her conscious of a wonderful seductive

power. She giggled delightedly. "Am I naughty?" she asked eagerly.

She was so close that she could feel Berry's breath in her face as he put his hands on her shoulders, as though she were a child, indeed. Her mood provoked and urged Berry, despite his serious undercurrent of thought. He smiled back into her eyes, shaking his head.

"You're as naughty—as hell!" he whispered, suddenly amused and excited.

Julia Brace's eyes were two dancing stars, her red lips apart. Never had she seemed to Berry so inviting, so absurd and childish. Slowly, almost unconsciously, Julia pressed closer until her bosom touched his breast. Berry's arms went from their clasp on her shoulders to encircle her figure. He stood there, holding her close, looking down into her eyes, tense with sudden desire. Her mouth, upturned and quivering, drew his down closer, closer until their lips touched, mingled, kindled an absorbing embrace in which Ferol had found them. So slight the meaning of this embrace, so unexpected a moment before, yet so utterly damning was it in its result.

Berry had gone out of the living room cursing himself for a fool—damning Julia Brace and Ferol with impartial rage. They were both to blame. He was more inclined to laugh at the whole scene but for the unexpected weeping in his heart. Ferol—Ferol whom he loved!

He sat now before the fireplace, waiting for her to speak, to heap reproaches upon him, to weep, even to revile. But Ferol did none of these things. Instead she remained looking into the dead ashes as though down into the heart of the mystery of the ages, absorbed. Berry watched her with an ache which grew to a pain. Ferol did not love him. Here was no revulsion of the spirit and flesh from the unfaith of the partner of her love. She had forgotten him. She was able to——

A bitter exclamation from Berry aroused Ferol. She turned her face toward him inscrutable as always, controlled. Could he never break that calm! Berry got up and began walking the floor. "Well," he said, "go ahead! Say whatever you like."

"There is nothing to say," answered Ferol briefly.

"Good God, why not?" demanded Berry, stopping in his track across the rugs. "Why not? Don't you care? I may go to the devil and be damned. That's the idea, is it?"

Ferol looked at him sadly. "Oh, Berry, don't," she said, "don't work yourself into a rage. I know. I understand."

"Know what? Understand what?" he asked, glaring at her in helpless anger.

"How you feel about Julia. You don't care anything for Julia Brace, nor she for you."

"How do you know? I had her in my arms, hadn't I? I was kissing her as though I liked it, wasn't I? You're too damned sure of yourself. What's to hinder my loving Julia Brace?"

Ferol gazed at Berry despairingly, then into the white ashes, as she sat, benumbed by the tremendous fact of Berry's unfaith. Words began to ring through her mind with the reiterance of a tolling bell. "I ought to kill him. I ought to kill him. But I can't. I pity him. He's in hell. He don't know what he wants. It isn't Julia. I'm his wife. I'm square. I'd do more for him than any other woman ever will do. Why can't he be satisfied?" she was saying to herself.

As Berry sat silent, lost in wretched reflection of the scene leading up to Ferol's arrival, Ferol's mind cleared and her thoughts gathered into some sort of coherence. Suddenly, clearly, she saw herself confronting the crowd of upturned faces at the meeting in New York, swaying by means of her gift, the emotions of many people. What had she said? Flocking back into her memory like sheep returning home came her own words on that occasion. She had advocated a single standard of right conduct for men and women; above all, pleaded with women for stern self-searching before passing judgment on men. She could only search herself as she had advised others. Had not her own thoughts also turned toward another, others,—as an outlet to her

wretchedness—Volney Rusk, Gregory Worthington? The thought of such loose behaviour in retaliation for Berry's flirtation, it was true, had sickened her. Well, so had Berry sickened of Julia at the very moment when her lips touched his.

"I know that. I know that well, better than he knows," Ferol reassured herself. Yet she could not say frankly to Berry, "I am guilty in thought as you are in deed. Let us forgive and forget." Berry would not understand.

Staring at these actualities of experience which so flatly contradicted the ideal which she had evoked, Ferol recognised the flaw in her original premise. Women could not be wholly frank; no human being could. The nice balance which exists so precariously in married life would not permit of such jostling; it had to be maintained at any cost. Ferol saw clearly in her mind that the relations of husband and wife were so deftly intertwined, so magically tangled, that instead of clearing the way, frankness might break ruthlessly the skein of happiness. Women, then, dared not be honest, was Ferol's conclusion. Like a judgment carefully considered, her thoughts came clear and sound and fair. She said to herself bitterly, "With Berry no woman could do herself or him justice by being frank. And,—every woman has her Berry." Each has some one vital to her existence for whom she must be

silent, withhold retort. Reticence, then, was a more powerful factor than frankness in the inner life of every woman. Ferol had penetrated into an experience which, painful as it was, graciously had ripened her judgment.

A movement on Berry's part recalled Ferol from her reverie. Berry had suddenly collapsed, his endurance gone. He sat huddled in the great chair, his face hidden in his hands. He was trembling. Ferol got up with a feeling of shame and pity in her breast, strangely confused yet reaching to the depths of her emotions. She went to Berry, sat upon the broad arm of the chair and put her arm about his shoulders, one small hand tucked between his arm and side. She did not speak, but leaned her shoulder against his, offering the consolation of her soothing nearness. She had quieted him thus before. They sat for a long while. Berry dropped his hands from his face and rested his cheek against Ferol's bosom. They stared into the dead fire together.

CHAPTER XIX

THEREAFTER Ferol ignored the events of that day. She met Julia Brace with accustomed calm. There was no breach whatever in their relationship. For a while Julia did not go to Meadowlark, but it was not long before Ferol rode over to Los Mirlos with an invitation to the Worthingtons to dine. She and Berry were arranging a rather large dinner party in honour of James Sanger, the sculptor. Julia Brace accepted with a sly pout. She would have liked to wreak her annoyance upon Ferol, but there was no nice chance for such proceeding. Julia Brace was not a little annoyed at the calm manner in which Ferol had disposed of the incident. A flattering wrath or resentment would have balmed her wound, but Ferol's indifference had its value also. To stir up trouble would have destroyed Julia Brace's very real enjoyment of life in San Vincente. She was clever enough to realise that Ferol's magnanimity might not be shared by others. A glance at Mrs. Hill on their next meeting had reassured Julia of Ferol's silence. Her escapade was safe. For once she found a quality in Ferol which lacked crudeness—Ferol's reti-

cence was gratefully received. Julia Brace began openly to plan for a visit to New York to renew her wardrobe.

Relieved of the necessity of keeping up the absurd and tiring excursions which Julia Brace continually had inaugurated, Berry found a very real interest in renewing his acquaintance with big Jim Sanger, whom he had met variously in Rome, Paris and New York. Berry spent long hours in Jimmy Wagstaff's studio, where Sanger was a guest. Gregory Worthington frequently joined them there in those peculiarly satisfactory talks where no women were present to restrain the free and frank interchange of ideas and opinions of these men of the greater world of travel and art.

To the studio with Berry came Ferol one day. She was curious to see this James Sanger. A sculptor of world note and a personality so remarkable that no two people said the same things of him, piqued Ferol's interest. Here was a man who had fought his way up and won. Her heart beat faster at the thought. The fight and the winning alike were attractive to her.

Jimmy Wagstaff's small house was all studio. He slept on one of the many comfortable divans which the room held; knocked up a meal behind the curtain in one corner when too indifferent or absorbed to ride down town to the Chinese Kitchen to eat. He had one hobby which he indulged to

the derision of all. A fine lot of Rhode Island Reds at the far end of his place occupied much of his time and attention. He pampered and played with them in the complete modern chicken houses and enclosures which looked so strange in contrast to the tumble-down lean-to close by, where he sheltered his single hardy little broncho.

As Ferol and Berry rode up to the gate and got off their horses, Wagstaff waved to them frantically from the chicken yard. Berry laughed.

"Hen must have laid an egg. You go on into the studio, Ferol. We will come." Berry went off toward the excited chicken raiser, and Ferol stood watching them for a moment, to see what was the cause of the fuss. But their attitude on meeting did not betray anything of further interest, so she opened the front door and went in.

The riot of spring life was shut out from the long room by heavy curtains drawn close over the south windows. The high windows and skylight to the north let in a cold, even light which produced an effect of calm, of quiet, endless time. In the middle of the studio, critically examining a painting placed upon an easel in front of him, was James Sanger.

Ferol stood looking at him curiously. He was a big man; he reminded her somehow of the California redwoods. An immense and efficient calm about him corresponded to the majestic repose of the great trees which had remained undisturbed

for centuries. Like them James Sanger stood, one of infinite leisure. Time was not, for him. Jimmy Wagstaff was fond of saying that James Sanger was the only man left in the world who had time to think.

He stood with feet planted firmly far apart, looking fixedly, as though rooted to the spot. His large skilful hands hung limp in a moment's absorbed attention; his large feet were a fitting pedestal to his great body. The shaggy dark brown hair, close cropped so that he would not have to bother soon again with having it cut, had the thick persistent quality which hinted a tendency to curl. The wiry virility of this hair created an impression of life, of vigour. The big head was set firmly upon the strong shoulders, giving a finished perfection to the large body. Sanger's eyes were brown and rather large and long, with a power of expression which matched the depths of his emotions; his gaze was penetrating and steady. Two furrows, parallel and deep, marked a pathway between broad full projections of the brow over each eye. The nose was large and fleshy. There were marks of suffering in the two long lines passing down his cheeks from the base of his nose. A close-cropped moustache did not conceal the kind expression of Sanger's mouth, the tender mobility of the rather full lips, which betrayed at the same time the strength of his weakness and the power of his

strength. James Sanger had struggled; his furrowed brow, the lines about his mouth, showed that. He had persisted. The suffering stamped upon his lips made them grave in repose, yet when he smiled their expression was one of gentle kindness, which children loved. The whole rugged head and seamed countenance expressed struggle —battles fought, victories not always won. Not ordinary experiences came to this man, nor ordinary works of art came out of him. As he had lived, so spoke his work. He had arrived.

James Sanger filled the large bare studio, his presence belittling everything else in the room. He was not built for drawing rooms, rather for open spaces with vast tumbling clouds overhead. His great head and powerful shoulders always would seem out of place beside the delicate prettiness of the social type. He would have been more naturally a part of the surroundings which were his, swathed in a Roman toga.

Ferol stood for some moments staring at this man. Finally James Sanger looked away from the painting to see who had come in. He was not curious, so he had not hastened his inspection. When he saw Ferol Ward, bare-headed, wearing the conventional cross saddle riding clothes, Sanger's look passed over her leisurely, critically. He did not like the riding clothes, having long since pronounced them ugly and hence worthy only of suppression. But his gaze came back to

the halo of bronze hair standing out from the small head, loose and full of life from the gallop across the flats. Having reached her face in his investigation, James Sanger's glance ceased to wander. He looked at her, stared at her, until she came forward toward him with heightened colour and head well up. He was a curious man, she observed to herself, and had no more manners than she had. This thought made her laugh, those low bird notes which so suggested rippling streams, bird calls under the waterfall—always birds and water. Sanger thought of this. "Birds and water," he said to himself, "birds and green moss on wet rocks—love notes."

"I've wanted to see you," said Ferol frankly.

"Me? Why?" James Sanger answered, showing even white teeth under the short brown moustache.

"Everybody says you're self-made." Ferol sat down in a low lounge chair. She felt conscious of her riding clothes.

"Well?"

"So am I, only I haven't made much yet."

Sanger's fine dark eyes glinted with amusement. "Why, you're a child. You haven't begun."

"Oh, yes, I have," protested Ferol; "I've come a long way. You might not guess from just looking at me, but I am beginning to look back."

"Don't do that," James Sanger said quickly. "It doesn't pay. What's your name?"

"Ferol."

"Ferol. Well, 'Forward, Ferol!' should be your slogan. Some people waste more time studying their insignificant beginnings than it would take to make an important ending. What are you trying to do?"

"Oh, just live. Live right."

"Well, that's a pretty big rôle to play."

"It is," said Ferol; "I'm just finding that out. But some day I want to do more than just live."

"Want to uplift humanity, possibly?" queried James Sanger quizzically.

"You're laughing at me," said Ferol, and she laughed, too. But in a moment she flashed at him seriously, "Don't you believe a woman has a soul?"

"Oh, Lord! I hope so. I've never given the matter thought," groaned Sanger.

"Why not? I reckon you've been too busy thinking about yourself."

"That's about it," he admitted. "I've had to work, work from the streets up to the top floor studio. Perhaps you don't know exactly what that means, young woman?"

"Yes, I do. I'm a builder myself, and I had only the red sand of a river bottom to build on."

"Bit shaky at times, eh?"

"Sure is."

"Well, where did you come from, anyhow?" Sanger asked, sitting down opposite her on a raised platform.

"My Daddy used to say my red hair came from the Colorado river bottom," Ferol smiled as she put one hand to the shining fluffy mass of hair, "but Midges always said a red bird flew in and left his topknot on my head."

Sanger leaned forward and put one finger under her chin. He held her so for a moment, speechless. He had forgotten everything in observing the modelling of her mouth and chin. He drew his hand away abruptly. "Gad, you are not a child, are you. I only saw your eyes and hair. I beg your pardon. I'm an awful clod. In this dim light and with the laughter in your eyes, you seemed about six. In another moment I might have been telling you fairy stories."

Ferol felt a longing to seize his hand, to make him go on believing, so that she could, too, but she saw also that his mood had changed. He regarded her watchfully.

At this moment Jimmy Wagstaff and Berry Ward entered the room.

"So Mrs. Ward's taken you in hand, Jim? What do you think of our big man, Mrs. Berry?" Wagstaff went to wash up behind the curtains. Berry Ward nodded lightly to James Sanger, secretly regarding the other with resentment for his vigorous growth.

But James Sanger had no word of greeting for Berry Ward. He no longer saw in Ward the acquaintance of many years and many places; he saw him now solely as the husband of this delightful young creature before him. So she was his, his. For a moment the big man's vision was blurred. He put one hand up to his eyes, covered them a moment as though trying to recollect what he had been about to say, but he brought forth no word from this effort.

Jimmy Wagstaff came from his retreat and began to tell about the peculiarities of Belinda, his favourite red hen. The conversation drifted on aimlessly between Berry and Jimmy Wagstaff while James Sanger sat apparently listening. He was an excellent listener, and he spoke when he desired to say something, rarely otherwise.

Ferol wandered about the studio, looking at paintings, turning over drawings in a dusty portfolio. Her feelings were in a strange tumult, which was neither pleasant nor disagreeable. She felt stirred to her depths by this man who had drawn her on to speak of her beginnings—a frankness so rare with her. She felt alive, eager to go on talking with this giant, resentful of the interruption. What had she said? She felt herself capable of having told this man anything, anything! She turned resolutely.

"Home for us, Berry," she said brightly; "it is growing chill. It will be dark now by the time we

get in. Come! Will you bring Mr. Sanger to dine with us, Jimmy? Has Berry told you the day? It will be satisfactory to you? This dinner party is in honour of Mr. Sanger, so we must be very sure of him, knowing how guests of honour sometimes go astray in San Vincente." She looked at Jimmy Wagstaff mockingly.

He retorted, "Well, Jim Sanger is not a Volney Rusk. He could put me, even Berry, under the table. We will be there. Not death nor disaster will interfere, I promise."

As they went out, Ferol turned to James Sanger. He was looking at her intently, still watchful. She felt distrust in his gaze. She had intended to offer him her hand in farewell. Instead she went out of the room abruptly. When she had mounted her horse she felt rather than saw the big man come out of the house and lean against a pillar of the porch. A dampening circle was forming about her eyes; a nervous tremor of her hand made the horse restless. He started off violently so that she had to pull him up at a short distance to wait for Berry. The pair set off at a trot down the street out upon the flats and soon were hidden from view by the intervening houses. James Sanger did not change his position. He still watched.

CHAPTER XX

MY God, Samson, don't lean against my porch pillar like that!" Jimmy's voice rudely interrupted James Sanger's meditation. "Do you want to crush my whole house in?" Jimmy Wagstaff twitched him by the sleeve and went into the studio. Sanger followed slowly. He went in and picked up his pipe, began mechanically to fill it. He seemed oppressively silent to Jimmy Wagstaff, whose all-seeing eyes had noted his behaviour.

"What d'ye think of Berry's wife?" he asked wickedly. James Sanger sat down heavily upon a great couch. He began puffing his pipe slowly with quiet, appreciative inspiration of breath. Presently he removed the pipe from his mouth and fixed his large, earnest eyes upon his friend. "Where the devil did he find her?" he growled.

Jimmy Wagstaff stood in front of an easel rolling a cigarette, observing the other shrewdly. Before replying he ran the match along the support of the easel and took a few puffs of his cigarette. He spoke with an undertone of sincerity, of enthusiasm even, which belittled the light tone which he had used.

" 'Ware Berry, old man. He's the devil for jealousy. But, by Jove, I knew you'd see the beauty of her. Get the line of that chin, the curve of the lips? Good God, man, don't you wish to put her into marble? If she's got a body to match the mouth—and she has, by Gad. I've watched her. She moves like a wild animal. I'll wager she hasn't worn corsets a year. She moves as though every muscle in her back had been used. Her back! It's straight and sinewy as an Indian boy's. I've wished to sketch her a thousand times but I give you my word, I've never mentioned it yet. Berry'd get my goat. Fact! He can play around in other people's back yards, but, by gunny, he won't let anybody play in his. He's clean daft about her and sometimes I could believe he beats her!"

The big man uttered an oath and sat upon the couch, laying his pipe aside. He glared at the other ferociously.

"Not that I've ever seen any black eyes or heard cries from the Ward casa, but there is a look in his eyes sometimes—— Well, if you will believe me, sometimes it is the look of a god, and sometimes that of a beast. Queer chap, Berry."

"But the girl," growled back James Sanger, "where'd he find her?"

"Texas," briefly responded Wagstaff.

"So, red sand of the Colorado river bottom," ejaculated Sanger.

"Eh? Don't know the place. Never heard it mentioned, but I've heard her say she learned to ride and shoot as soon as she was able to stay on a horse and pull the trigger of a gun. She's not in Berry's class, that's plain." Jimmy Wagstaff belonged to that class himself, and knew its limitations. He continued, "She's a creature of the wild—you feel it instinctively, and yet she has herself in hand. Berry may think he's tamed her, but—I'll bet that's what's eatin' him. He don't know what she will do next. If he plays around with Julia Brace long enough, he'll find out," wound up Jimmy with an inviting air of willingness to tell more if urged.

Jim Sanger looked at him with sudden penetration. "What does Berry see in that doll?" he asked carelessly.

"God knows," ejaculated Jimmy. "Maybe he likes playing Narcissus at the fringed pool of her eyes. They certainly are vacant enough. He's gone after her hard even for San Vincente. If any other man went after his wife like that, Berry'd eat him alive."

James Sanger's lips hardened under the moustache, giving his face a sinister expression, but he said nothing. As Jimmy ceased to speak, took up a novel and lost himself in its pages, James Sanger let himself relax and sink back on the couch. He had heard enough. He did not need another word to complete his knowledge of the

situation. He lay there staring with unseeing eyes at the sky-light, visualising the past.

His own cruel and enlightening experiences passed before James Sanger from the time when he had drifted out of the west—a hazy west of a mining camp which he scarce could remember; a bearded father with glowing dark eyes and great hands, a miner he must have been. He could recall his mother's blue laughing eyes and blue-black hair, bright spirit and wonderful tales, which bespoke Celtic ancestry. Who were they; where had they come from? He did not know. Visions of his childhood passed before him. The certain memory of a snowy bare landscape, black wooden shacks against the mountain side, himself in his mother's arms, both wrapped in a warm shawl. His father coming upon them with his tin lunch bucket in his hand, his great hands grimy, his face streaked, the whites of his eyes giving a wild expression against the black of the coal-smeared face. The strong pressure of himself and his mother against this bearded giant. A deep laugh. He could not forget these things; they belonged to his beginnings. A high, dry country surely, where there was coal. He could have put his finger on the place with a little study of coal sections. But he had not. He kept intact certain memories of the open, of a glad free life high up among the clouds, a joy lived by three in a small complete circle.

Then another blank and New York with all the squalor of the east side. His mother weeping, himself hungry, clinging to her skirts. And then another man, white-skinned, weak-faced; a whining voice sending him forth to beg upon the streets. He saw again his revolt from the shame of it, his beatings, then the chance to sell papers and he had his foot upon the first rung of the ladder.

James Sanger must have been about seven when he lost track of his mother and the man. Whether they had abandoned him or whether his mother had died, he never knew. He could not find her in the small room. He was pushed out roughly. He returned only to be rebuffed in the same way. Finally he had ceased to go back, lost the location of the room. He had slept in boxes, hidden away in obscure areaways, companioned by various creatures. For a long time a shaggy dog had kept him company, kept him from freezing. Then those who had tolerated him because of his growing strength, criminals, the scum, the dregs, the offcastings of life, were his companions. Yet he grew and throve, starved seldom because of his keen mind and strong frame, persisting in his paper-selling, shoe-blacking, saving. Untouched by his companions, curiously he stood alone, fed upon his memories, especially those of his mother; the tales she had told him; her merry humour surviving in his ringing laugh.

In sweeping out studios, Sanger had first come in contact with art. He had picked up a working acquaintance with a sculptor, acquired a foothold in the studio, suddenly found himself learning to draw. He recalled the first thrill of a bit of modelling clay in his fingers. He had watched and waited; finally, owing to a kindly, careless master, studied. Still he sold papers, established a stand, increased it to several, which gave him a hoard and the final chance to study in Rome and Paris. None but James Sanger knew how he had crawled up from the slime, battling against the whole world, which seemed determined to push him under. How few helping hands he had ever seen outstretched save in a moment's impulsive generosity, outlived, dismissed with the hour. No constructive aid had ever reached him save work. Work had regulated and uplifted, shaped and pinched him into manhood with fingers as powerful as fate. And through it all he laughed. People, the good and the bad, had no influence in his life. Necessity quickened and endeavour grounded. His foundations grew straight and true, though none could see how or why. He had a capacity for work which none could approach.

Women as well as men had entered his life only to pass out again like shadowy visions without substance or place in his true existence. He could love for an hour madly and rush away without a word of farewell, to put some vision into

shape with deft, blunt fingers. He took with free hand and gave little of himself in return. For his blithe laughter and kind gentleness, which had no wish to hurt, he was welcomed and forgiven, his eccentricities overlooked. Jim Sanger was mad, it was conceded. Until he could work off that madness in clay or marble, best to let him go with a smile and welcome him back when he came again, sunny and gay, ready for another play time.

Sanger had seen every kind of life. Cities and experience had educated him. When books came his way, he had met them with open mind, taken from them what he needed as he did from people, then laid them aside. A natural refinement kept him from coarsening experiences; his own powerful individuality held him aloof. Standing alone against the world, he disregarded it. He had won. Social conventions had been broken to suit his vital needs. He followed his own ideals with inflexible determination. He made money with small effort when he needed it. When Sanger's works began to command a price, he found himself with more money than he knew what to do with. He travelled, worked. From the wild animals of the jungle to the delicate live figures of his imaginative creations, he took his themes from life—what he saw or what he dreamed. His Celtic mother had given him dreams that were more real than life itself. In this world he lived with-

drawn, yet a man of many friends in many lands, and the imprint of it all was on his face, lined and seamed and alive.

And here was this scrap of a girl. A nobody like himself. She had had experiences, too; the lines about her mouth had shown him that. What was she? A thing alive, vital, born for him. He recognised this at once; the flame of her personality had marked him for hers in one devouring passage. And she belonged to Berry Ward. Jim Sanger thought of Berry Ward with dull resentment. Who was he, anyhow, standing thus in James Sanger's path? A creature to be swept aside, crushed if need be. The girl must be his. His wife. That was what he wanted. She was not the creature for an hour's pleasure. She was true and trusty like a steel blade, and destined to be the mother of fine sons, his sons. He had never really wanted a woman before, never known the desire for absolute possession. He could not share her with Berry Ward.

Sanger took up his pad and pencil, and sitting up, began to draw. He drew her profile, pencilling with delicate appreciation the tender mouth and curving chin. He began to work on a full face portrait. In working on her eyes, looking into the steely, fringed, black-pooled depths of them, his pencil became idle, his hand flagged. He was lost in reverie again.

To have her alone with him away from all these

people who did not seem to realise that they were in the way. Stupid fools. A dinner party. How was he to get through a dinner party with Ferol at the head of the table. Ferol. He called her that gently under his breath. She had felt him, too; had been aware of their vital relation. He was sure of that. Ferol. It was the name for her. Flame, fire, the rusty tinge of her hair like forest flame veiled in smoke; the red of her lips, the glow of colour under the white, satiny skin; the free supple use of her body like a flame, swaying, leaping. They would run through the forest together, meet the wild things face to face, kindred. He must have her with him, alone—in the forest—in the forest.

Sanger roused himself, thrust the sketches back into the book and fastened it with a snap. He looked at Jimmy Wagstaff, who had lighted a green-shaded reading lamp and was wasting time on a paltry love story. He got up and strode around the room.

"Jimmy," he said, coming to a standstill beside his friend, "I thought you said we should have a camping trip. You have lured me out here under false promises. I must get into the forest. Dinner parties. Do you mean to tie a string to me and make me perform for your pretty ladies? I will get into the ghastly rags of civilisation this once to please you, but not again. And for this I exact the promise of immediate hike. You said

wait until June. It will be June in another week. Let us pack our traps and go."

Jimmy Wagstaff threw aside his book and rose to the summons. They plunged into a discussion of the best place to go, pawing over rough sketches of El Rey River country, marking the difficult trails, considering the distance for each day's march, rejecting first one stream and then another for promise and lure of finer fishing further up. They were still at this pleasant occupation until hunger overtook them, when they carried their discussion to the Chinese Kitchen. Far into the night they talked. And James Sanger knew of one woman who would go with the party, no matter what changes such going might involve. But he kept this purpose to himself.

CHAPTER XXI

IF Berry Ward had had less keenness of perception he might not have suffered as he did, quite from the beginning of Ferol's acquaintance with James Sanger. During the dinner he watched them miserably from his end of the table, still keeping up the cynical flow of nonsense with those placed near him. He had never seen Ferol as she appeared on this night, her eyes glowing like hot pools of metal, colour crimsoning in her cheeks and lips, hair more alive and shining; like a flaming orchid she was poised against the rough, tree-like solidity of James Sanger at her right. Unconsciously she bent toward him like a delicately-stemmed flower in the breeze, lips curved in the tender, happy smile so new to her face. Berry marked the glowing lips and upturned quivering glance. He had never succeeded in putting such a look in her eyes; not for him had she bloomed and sparkled, her youth set free. She talked. My God, how she, the silent, reticent one, talked! Berry strained his ears to hear what she had to say. His own manner grew more cold and polished, more formally polite, his laughter brittle. He had a strange feeling of being two

persons, one the eager, wretched husband, the other the calm, affable host. How active the one became in concealing the other!

What they said was mostly utter nonsense like two children at play. Yet how Ferol responded to Jim Sanger, how she met his unspoken thought, anticipated the path of his humour! Berry himself was caught in the net of her charm, fascinated in spite of his suffering, smiling when he most ached. He recognised the meeting of two kindred spirits, marked the magnetic attraction with as certain knowledge as James Sanger's own. These two—they were destined for each other. He flung the thought from him bitterly with a merry jest; concealed his biting fear by a witty anecdote. Yet there they were ever before him, inviting him to fresh discovery of their kinship.

The dinner finally came to an end. An interminable time the men sat over their cigars. Some one proposed to continue smoking in the living room. The group broke and drifted, leaving Berry standing by the buffet, pouring with a shaking hand a stiff drink of whisky. He drank it down swiftly, making a wry face as he followed it with a small chaser. Berry needed all the stimulation and bracing he could get out of that drink.

The night was cool as usual in that high altitude. A small fire was glowing on the hearth. As Berry entered the living room he saw with momentary relief that James Sanger was talking

to Gregory Worthington. In this flood of relaxation a sort of reaction set in which carried him straight to these two in animated discussion. As he approached, Greg glanced up and exclaimed, "Berry will know; he was up at the Lodge in the autumn. How was the trail over Grumpy Mountain, Berry? Do you think we could make it with the women?"

"Women, what women!" exclaimed Berry sharply.

"Oh, all of them," murmured Greg vaguely. "I'm not sure that Julia will go, as she has planned a trip east, but she may throw that over for this fishing trip. You know how keen she is for the sport." Gregory spoke more naturally of Julia Brace than for a long time. He was reassured by the apparent loss of interest between Julia and Berry, encouraged by the open plan for going east which Julia had spoken of to every one.

"Mrs. Hill says she will go; Mrs. Pitney also. I don't know what others, but Jimmy can tell you," remarked James Sanger calmly. "This is Jimmy's party. Hasn't he spoken of it to you?"

At this moment Jimmy came toward them laughing gaily. "I've just been telling the girls what they can carry in their war bags. Fanny Hay says she won't go because I did not mention tooth brushes and hot water tins. We had a real Princess person out here one summer," he ex-

plained to Sanger, "who kept us all fussed up about her hot water tin and how to carry it on the pack horses. When we were settled in camp we discovered why she had persisted so. Every morning, after each meal and at night, the plain American husband whom she had taken unto herself heated water in that can and held it for her, pouring the water while she brushed her teeth. Mountain stream water always made her teeth ache, she explained. We were so relieved when we knew, but Fanny ever since has wanted to follow the lady's example. And she insists that she can prove that an American lard can would serve the purpose just as well and be easier to carry, since it has served every other purpose known to God and man in a camping outfit in the west. Berry, your wife says she won't need anything but some fish hooks and a gun. I wish you'd reason with her. She seems strangely devoid of knowledge of her own needs. It embarrasses a bachelor to be her informant, but—she will need curling kids or a curling iron, cold cream and face powder. On those articles I stand pat. I know whereof I speak. I have camped with ladies."

Julia Brace interrupted. She had come up behind Gregory Worthington and put a small hand on his shoulder, leaning against him with the naïveté of a child. "Jimmy, you forget your part," she mocked him; "better urge the ladies to take the things you men will need." She

turned toward James Sanger with the cunning smile and confidential pose which was so much a part of her manner, "Last time Jimmy named what was to go in the war bags, and the women very foolishly obeyed his orders, fearing to overload the pack horses. When we had been in camp a few days and beards were becoming scratchy there was a wild tent-to-tent canvass among the men for a mirror to shave by. Not one mirror could be found. No woman had brought a mirror along after Jimmy's explicit list." She turned back to Wagstaff with a mocking smile, "Better get a woman to edit the lists for the men and women, too," she jeered.

Berry listened with sinking heart. Ferol would want to go, was planning to go. The women had not gone the year before, though Ferol had been anxious to join the autumn hunt. Hard riding and frequent change of camp had ruled the women out of the planning. At this time of year there would be no reasonable excuse. Berry felt himself pursued by an inexorable fate, pushed to the edge of a precipice. In the intimacy of camp life what might not arise between these two? He might be able to find an excuse for himself, but not in reason could he keep Ferol at home with him when every one knew that she was eager and longing for a first taste of camp life in New Mexico. She would go. It was useless to struggle.

When the guests had gone, Berry came softly back to the living room after bidding the last farewell at the door. He found his wife standing in front of the fire looking down into its whitening embers with smiling eyes and lips as though she had that moment ceased to speak. Berry put his arm about her waist, as he came to pause beside her. He felt the sudden revulsion which quivered through her frame, the involuntary effort to withdraw from his embrace. But it was controlled as quickly. They stood, leaning gently, side to side, looking into the fire, Berry brushing Ferol's fingers softly against his lips as he moved her hand against his cheek. The familiar gesture calmed and reassured them both. Ferol leaned closer and rubbed her cheek to his.

"Was it a nice party?" she asked.

"Perfect," answered Berry. "You were radiant. I never knew you to talk so much. Was Jim Sanger so entertaining, then?"

"He's—different," answered Ferol, another reminiscent smile fluttering over her lips, her eyes. She moved slightly away from Berry, loosing his hand, then turned back impulsively. "Life isn't so bad, after all, is it, Berry?" Shining eyes, true wells of happiness, quivering lips, unconsciously betraying—and still, Ferol did not understand. A mist rose before Berry's eyes as he drew her to him, crushing her eyelids down

with his lips, hiding from himself the joy in her eyes.

"Not while I have you, Ladybird," he whispered into the bright meshes of her hair.

CHAPTER XXII

A WEEK of preparation gave opportunity for many chance meetings between Sanger and Ferol. Plans for the trip to be discussed in detail usually were thrashed out around Ferol's tea table. Sudden development of complication called for unexpected conferences, as in the arrest of the cook engaged for the trip, the failure to obtain some horse needed for the party. Horses accustomed to mountain trails were a necessity. It was upon such an errand that Sanger and Wagstaff swung off their horses at Meadowlark one morning. Wagstaff had been on a prolonged search for an especially reliable horse for Mrs. Hill.

Berry met them at the door. He was ready for riding, had been about to start to town. They found Ferol in the living room, a glowing centre for the sunshine-filled place. With screen hooked back, Ferol was feeding the birds on the window sill, absorbed in their greedy antics. She turned with quickening heart and shy smile to greet the men. In the confusion of these early days of her acquaintance with James Sanger, Ferol was continually aware of her own insignificance. Van-

ished was the iridescent bubble of her once valiant conceit. The self-revealing first talk with Sanger had made her wary of further meetings. What might she not reveal to this man in the moment's self-forgetfulness due to his disturbing presence!

"We've got the horse for Mrs. Hill, at last," announced Jimmy Wagstaff, bowing profoundly over Mrs. Berry's hand.

"Miller's pinto," jested Ferol, naming the jauntiest broncho of her acquaintance. She had amused herself at Wagstaff's expense in this matter of horses. Jimmy Wagstaff could paint; that was admitted. But it was the fad to impute lack of knowledge of horseflesh to Jimmy, who rode awkwardly enough, but who, nevertheless, as he himself pointed out, always arrived.

"Nay, madam," retorted Wagstaff, "I've reserved that brute for you in case your own pet charger is lamed. I have now to offer a perfect rocking horse of an animal. One warranted to have the gentle gaits of a cradle and feet as unlikely to go astray as an infant's therein. You and Berry are to come along and have a look at the beast."

"Take Berry. I'll trust his judgment," said Ferol.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Berry.

"I've promised Fanny Hay to look over a New York catalogue this morning. We are going to select new frocks. I'm going in the car." lied

Ferol blithely. She longed to go with the men, to be near Sanger, but she also feared to go. The man's presence was so disturbing that instinctively Ferol avoided opportunities which offered the chance brief happy moments of words with James Sanger.

Sanger was looking at Ferol. He caught the lie in her changing colour. He was aware that Ferol tried to avoid him, but with all of a strong, direct man's impatience with indirection, he wished that Ferol would not lie to gain her end. A lie to James Sanger was always petty. No occasion could be great enough to demand such unworthy tactics. That Ferol avoided him was natural. He could understand the motives of fear and shyness, of instinctive self-protection, but evasion was not what he willingly would allow. Ferol, who ordinarily gained her point by a silent impassivity which heard all and remained inflexible, now found herself recklessly involved in explanations and quick words wholly foreign to her nature. Wishing, yet fearing, to put herself right in Sanger's eyes, Ferol permitted him to encounter misunderstandings, rather than to reveal herself.

The men went away, leaving Ferol momentarily crushed. Why had she not gone with them, she questioned herself wretchedly, subsiding miserably in a chair. The birds were forgotten; they chirped upon the window sill in vain while Ferol

sat in a dream world, recalling Sanger's strong, lined face, his ardent dark eyes. She had reached the reassuring conclusion that she had been wise, indeed, and must develop fresh wisdom to evade that compelling personality, when James Sanger returned.

He came in quite unannounced and sat down beside Ferol serenely. He had eluded the other two men and hastened back to Meadowlark. Ferol sat looking at this man, quaking inwardly, drawn by a desire to reveal her inmost soul to the answering spirit which evoked her complete self-surrender. Leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, Sanger looked into her eyes.

"Ferol," he said gently, "why do you lie?"

Ferol flushed furiously. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I don't lie—except about little things. One must lie—at times."

"You're wrong. You don't need to lie ever. You are too strong for lying. Only the coward lies."

"I'm not a coward," protested Ferol fiercely. Somehow this man always managed to stir her emotions to the depths. "I don't lie because I'm afraid. I lie because—" she hesitated, aware that she would reveal her real motive in a denial—"because it's easy," she continued bravely, "because I always have, I reckon."

Sanger took this explanation at its true value. He realised that it might be in a measure true

that Ferol in her struggle to advance should employ unworthy weapons in defence against a merciless world. With his usual ruthless determination, Sanger had made up his mind to uproot this petty habit from Ferol's character. He regarded her now gravely, almost pityingly.

"You poor little rat," he exclaimed, "you never have had anybody to take care of you, to teach you what it means to be honest."

Ferol resented this in a flare of anger. "I don't want your pity. I play the game fair. I'm honest."

"But you lie," he insisted.

"Not when it's anything serious," Ferol urged hotly. "I only lie when I have to——"

Sanger interrupted. "When do you have to?" he asked keenly. Not wishing to further embarrass her, he added quickly, "I know,—in order to protect yourself. You lied this morning so's to avoid me. Don't do it. I understand. I'd rather you'd insult me than lie to avoid me. You'll get used to me after a while. I know I'm rough. You have a kid brother, you say. Well, just treat me like that kid. If I am naughty, slap me!"

Ferol's laugh was choked. She was ashamed, humiliated, so that she could hardly speak, but she gained control of her voice and said with bitter humility, "I know I'm nothing but a rat. But I can quit lying." She trembled and her face flushed a deep red. "I've made myself—do so

many things." She quivered a smile at him. "I'll never lie again," she promised. She left him abruptly.

Preparations for the camping party were about concluded at the end of the week. Julia remained steadfast in her determination to go east. What this fixity of purpose cost her none knew. The sport tempted her to extremity; a new man in the party to charm and subjugate drew her on, yet Julia's pride would not brook the intimate companionship of Ferol Ward. Not yet. Certain childish natures which flee responsibility, ignore duties and refuse to regard life seriously, are most wounded when, in return, they find themselves taken as lightly, as seriously, as a child. Julia Brace suffered this ignominy.

Though she played with the idea and pretended seriously to consider it, there was no question of Fanny Hay's going. She would not have gone so far from the bedside of Wils Hay for any purpose, but her dallying with the idea gave the Captain renewed faith in his condition, winged his hope anew. For a time he actually believed his wife might go and heard her final decision with a deep inner gasp of relief. Almost in the same breath he urged her to go. This by-play was a part of the life in San Vincente, always a bold front lightly put forward to conceal an unselfish purpose.

The Hills would go, once the matter of a safe horse for Mrs. Hill had been arranged; Mrs. Pitney also, and the Captain later for a time, if he could get leave; Berry and Ferol, Jimmy Wagstaff and James Sanger; horse wrangler and cook,—the party was complete. No attempt was made to go outside the immediate intimate circle, yet it widened at the last moment to admit a stranger.

Julia Brace's young, unmarried sister arrived unexpectedly, almost, from Rome and was confided to Mrs. Hill's care until Julia's return. Alice Brace was as different from her sister as possible. She was sweet-tempered and easy-going, with a sort of young, blooming beauty. She carried lightness and joy as easily as some young things bend to the burden of the world's sorrow. She had large white teeth, which showed a great deal between the rather full lips of her ample mouth. She was taller than Julia and deep-bosomed and sturdy as though sprung from quite another stock. She had not been in America since childhood, and never before had visited the west. It was her first camping trip, her first taste of the freedom and goodfellowship of western American social life.

Dwelling continually in foreign countries, the mother of these two girls had brought them up to conform in every particular to the life of European capitals, where her husband's wealth and

social existence had place and power. Alice Brace never had gone anywhere without a chaperon. She had not thought for herself or reasoned. Accustomed to the background until her older sister's marriage, Alice had emerged fresh and blooming. Only the threatened danger of the admiration and pursuit by a young prince had permitted her hasty withdrawal to her native land. She had been hurried off with a friend of her mother's travelling to California, and had arrived in San Vincente almost as soon as the letter explaining the hasty cabled announcement of her coming. Mrs. Brace was too wise an American mother to risk the seductive charm of a polished young princeling upon her carefully reared school-girl. She knew too well the risks of international marriages. Alice, unaware and delighted at the thought of visiting America, was hustled off before great harm was done. The memory of a pair of beaux yeux above a glittering uniform, bold stares and ardent pressures of the hand, soon was dissipated in the high keen air of the mountains, the companionship of these out-of-door folk.

Alice enjoyed everything, even the dangerous trails; she was too ignorant of the danger to be afraid. Once at a bad place on slippery rocks of the trail her horse went down on his knees. Every member of the camping party paused breathless, stilled and gripped by fear. Alice took this sud-

den kind interest at its face value and returned it with a bland and nerveless smile. Below her several hundred feet a rocky gorge shut in the roar of a mad stream. An anxious movement, a frightened gesture or thought, would have communicated itself to the horse and they would have been dashed from the trail. But Alice was not afraid. She sat quietly waiting for her horse to rise. After a brief pause, the beast scrambled to his feet as though he had performed this feat every day in the year. At the top of the trail in a safe, widened platform on the saddle of the mountain, Mrs. Pitney disgraced herself by suddenly fainting and even the men wiped beads of perspiration from their brows, the danger safely past. Alice Brace did not know until she was safely at home in Los Mirlos after the trip was over, what had caused the sudden flurry of excitement. Such was Alice Brace, beloved of the entire party from that precarious moment.

Ferol usually was far ahead, helping to drive the pack horses, darting down the mountain side after a wanderer with as much ease as a cowboy, singing at the top of her voice, surprising them all with her zest and intrepidity.

Berry watched her grimly, followed her pace though it cost him no small effort, keeping her always within range of his searching eyes. Once she said to him, when they brushed close together on the trail, "What makes me so happy, Berry?

I want to sing, to yell. I reckon I'm spring mad!"

And another watched her, too, warily, hungrily, with unfaltering determination in his heart. James Sanger waited and watched.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE trail which they followed for three days ran for a while parallel to El Rey River, then branched to follow the dry water bed of Walnut Creek. Down the narrow trail cut into the mountain side they passed in among the great boulders of the stream, the sure-footed horses carefully picking a way on the water-polished stones. Where water could go these small beasts seemed to find courage to follow, stepping down over the course of a small waterfall, jumping small discrepancies in the floor of the canyon, never pausing except to snatch a mouthful of green growth from some crevice in the side of the canyon. They passed under the streaked yellow sides of a solid mountain of alum, some time destined to bring a fortune to an enterprising speculator; forded the swift, sweeping depths of El Rey River as they crossed and recrossed it from time to time; and finally began to climb, mounting persistently precipitous sides to narrow, perilous backbones, up, up, under the shadow and beauty of still higher points. Crossing Grumpy Mountain was a feat in itself which exhausted and broke the high cour-

age of the travellers more than all the rest of the trip, but it brought them out upon a grassy plateau and down into the tranquil beauty of Vinegarone Creek, where the men had established a sort of lodge for the autumn shooting season.

Vinegarone Lodge was a simple two-room cabin of logs, with great fireplaces in each room, several rude beds in one, and a long rough table and cook stove in the other. Lumber and household furniture had been brought up at no small risk of life and limb, so that the Lodge supplied simple necessities. A man of cowboy and trapper qualifications lived at the Lodge all the year. Martin took care of the cabin supplies and made himself useful on the cattle range thereabouts, where the cattle grew wild and strayed far into more precipitous regions. For this reason he was permitted to live undisturbed on the Bar C range, a solitary soul, shut in by the winter storms, trapping animals for skins, killing enough deer for meat, jerking it for winter use; alone but for the occasional cowboy riding the range, or the fishing and hunting parties which made headquarters at Vinegarone Lodge. He helped with the horses, cleaned the fish, prepared the game and was to be relied upon as guide. Here the party came to a halt, put up tents and established a permanent camp. Usually they slept out, canvas-covered beds used as lounging places during the day, tents reserved for dressing and privacy. The Lodge

was left undisturbed, yet depended upon for the unexpected rainy day. Rains were not due in this region before July, so the campers expanded in careless comfort over the small flat which extended back from the boisterous stream, under the shadow of a high wall or cliff which hid the east and brought a tardy sunrise. The thin pure air, the active life of seeking the wary trout from pool to pool, long rides and hard climbing, all went to produce the profound and persistent slumber which overwhelmed at dark and operated like an anæsthetic until the day was well begun.

A wild tangle of underbrush closed in about the camp ground on every side except where it led down to the stream. Along the creek a narrow trail passed in and out among the trees, the boulders, crossed the stream from time to time and continued up into the deeper fastnesses of the mountains. The horses were safe in a shut-in meadow on the plateau above, a grassy, naturally enclosed place known to cattle rustlers in less quiet days on the frontier.

Upon the bubbling noisy stream and the white tents the sun shone down persistently day after day in the cool June weather, warming the small open circle of the camping place, heating the rocks and the water for bathers less keen for the icy morning plunge. No pool near the camp was actually deep enough for swimming, but deep hollows in the rocks worn by the waters of ages made

ample bathtubs with none to restrain from joyous splashings.

Life in camp slipped at once into well-worn tranquil grooves. The cook sounded the dish pan with a large spoon at eight in the morning. Those who wished to be early on the trail or first at some fishing pool rose at dawn, constrained only by the rule of silence. After the crisp breakfast of trout and curling bacon, fat Dutch oven biscuits, steaming fried potatoes, the choice of marmalades and preserves, came the horse wrangler with horses saddled for those who had planned to follow the fresh bear tracks of the evening before, or to go to some distant pool which lured into another creek. Those who would fished nearer camp; whipped the stream up and down, never failing to provide trout for three lusty meals of the day.

At first the fishing intrigued all. Ferol forgot herself in the joy of her beloved sport; excluded from her recognition even Berry until he felt secure in her sportsmanship and permitted himself to be led afield. The deer season was closed, but there was talk almost at once of meat being low and the possible stern necessity of killing one deer for the preservation of life, but for days the deer were wary. Tracks there were, fresh and frequent along the creek, up the steep slopes of the mountain sides. The men sometimes abandoned the fishing and wandered on horseback into the depths of other canyons in groups or pairs

for self-protection in case of bear, yet alert and watchful for smaller and swifter game which occasionally flashed up the mountain side, streaked across the face of a distant mountain or called by a sudden scurry of hoofs or padded paws or creaking twigs in the underbrush. None came near save a mountain lion discovered at dawn by the cook.

Mrs. Hill did not care for fishing. She loved the open, the light and shadow on the stream, the graceful trees, the pure sweet water, the varying face of nature. These trips into the mountains were her delight. Her strength advanced like a miracle to meet the requirements of the difficult journey, but once in camp, she was content with infrequent excursions and small effort. Mrs. Pitney and Alice Brace were as persistent fishermen as Ferol. The three wandered up and down stream, separating for greater success.

Ferol landed a small plump trout, the size most common along these streams, and put it safe in her basket. It was a day to make the heart glad, crisp air and warming sunshine. For a moment she stood, relaxed from the excitement, watching the sun and leaves dappling the pool. She dropped her rod and drew in a long deep breath. Her eyes, lifted to the mountain heights, scanned the rimmed mountain rising so near at hand. A pair of birds skimmed down from the heights, passed over her head and mounted higher across

the stream. Suddenly she felt a keen longing to climb to those palisaded heights. She wanted to get up on some high place and look down. She left her fishing basket and rod beside the stream, turned into the slight underbrush beside the trail and found herself face to face with a fox. Some wild impulse leaped within her to meet this small pretty creature which jumped from the low-lying branches of a tree against the rocks, paused as she did, and stood eyeing her with as much curiosity and calm as another Texan. She heard a click behind her which she recognised. Without turning her head Ferol said softly, "Don't shoot." The fox looked from her to the other person who had come up behind her, a calm, satisfying survey, then turned his back and trotted quietly off into the thick underbrush. Ferol faced about, her eyes bright with excitement, to find James Sanger behind her, his rifle dropped at her command, his smiling eyes meeting her mood with fine understanding.

"Let's follow it," she whispered, as though there were still reason for caution. Sanger assented with a swift gesture. He drove into the underbrush, making a way for her to follow, pausing to hold back the strong wiry branch of some small tree, shielding her from the thorns of a shrub or vine. Presently they ran into the small deep trail, worn by the trotting of small padded feet. Jim Sanger looked at the tracks and

beckoned her on. They caught the spirit of the adventure, climbed the steep side of the mountain with eager effort, only to lose the track of the small hurrying feet on the rocks as they mounted higher. They paused for breath among the great masses of stone, the chase abandoned. Below, the roof of the Lodge was visible among the trees, the glimmer of white tents. The fishermen along the stream were hidden from sight under the growth of trees and shrubs along its edge. Above, the rimmed rock of the mountain stood out clearer, still distant. Ferol looked up longingly.

"I want to go to the very top," she said; "I want to go up there and stand on that edge and look down."

"We'll go," announced Sanger promptly. "Now, have you got your breath?"

And so they climbed and paused to rest, drifting into easy comradeship, finding suddenly so many things to talk about that the words tumbled over each other to utterance. They laughed at their own absurdities, lifted suddenly, caught up into the atmosphere of joy, where they disported like a faun and a naiad beneath the canopy of their imaginations.

Among the rocks as they climbed slowly, Ferol stumbled and lurched forward. Jim Sanger grasped her hand to save her from a fall. At the same moment he caught a glimpse of Ferol's feet on the rocky, bare place where they were stand-

ing. Ferol had not been prepared for climbing. She had planned to fish a hundred yards from the camp. She wore strong, high-heeled, gun metal pumps. She looked down at her shoes, too, ruefully smiling. They were scuffed and dusty.

"What shoes for climbing!" exclaimed James Sanger. "Let me have a look at them." Ferol put her two small feet out before her as she sat resting on the rock.

"You have the most absurd feet in the world," he said, looking at them frankly. "Were your parents Chinese by any chance? Did they bind your feet while you were still too small to protest?" Without waiting for a reply, he commanded her, "Take off those silly pumps!" Ferol unbuttoned the single strap of one pump and put a silk-clad foot upon the rocks.

"Ah," exclaimed James Sanger, "that is something like. Now we have the beauty of the arch under the instep. You should never wear shoes. Sandals might be allowed. Your feet are hideous in high-heeled slippers."

Ferol was amused by this tirade. She slipped her foot back into the shoe. As she bent to fasten the button, Ferol thought of Julia Brace. Julia would have coquettishly compelled this man to fasten the button of her shoe. Ferol longed to imitate Julia's tricks but she could not. Such small manœuvres were alien to her nature. She had neither arts nor crafts to practise on men.

It was this unconscious placing of herself upon the level of companionship, of forgetting sex, which made her such an endearing companion to a man. If she knew her power to attract, she set no great value upon it. And James Sanger met her lack of self-consciousness with quiet, natural enjoyment. Ferol satisfied and attracted him in so many ways that he was able to keep the lure of her sexual attraction in the background. She was to him a dear child, a lovable young thing as tender and fleeting as a wood nymph, and the next moment flashed upon him the facet of her practical womanhood.

Ferol was very happy. In the close intimacy of camp life, she had lost her fear of James Sanger's presence. She had not reached the point of self-questioning. Like a young pagan, she held out her arms to the sun, frankly, yearningly, and was glad. The ripple of her laughter drew the birds, the velvety deep tones of her voice stirred forgotten depths in the hearts of the others who watched her, more conscious of what grew in her heart than she herself, who scattered sunshine like the sun because she could not help it.

They were near the top now, close to the rugged stratum of mal pais or lava which formed the rim of the mountain. The man leaned against the high rock on which Ferol sat. Both faced the glittering sun in the west as it hung for a brief

time over the green-pointed tip of Grumpy Mountain.

Ferol held out both arms toward the sun. "I'd like to drink to the sun god," she said, "I'm so happy."

"Happy," repeated the man, gazing at her, his chin upon his hand, an elbow resting on the rock beside her. He looked long into her eyes, plumbed their depths and withdrew his glance, trembling. He took a fold of her skirt in his hand and held it close to his cheek, brushing his lips against it. He dared not look up at her again until he had mastered his emotion.

"I am tasting happiness for the first time," he said. "Are you?"

"Yes," she breathed in return, letting her hand slip down to rest lightly on his head. He felt the small trembling fingers sink into his hair. Sanger remained motionless near her, his hands in the folds of her skirt yet not touching her body; he rested, thrilled under the touch of her fingers, yet stilled into a glorious calm.

The sun dropped down suddenly behind the pointed tips of the dark green trees. Bereft of its golden radiance, they immediately became practical, self-conscious. In a moment they were hurrying down the mountain side over the shattered mal pais boulders along the tiny trail, through the underbrush and out upon the bank of

the stream, where Ferol's rod and basket lay untouched.

As they came into camp, the others greeted them derisively from the supper table. All but Berry. Berry gloomed at them through the dusk. He got up from the long table under the tree as they approached.

"We climbed nearly to the top of the rim," Ferol announced blithely, ignoring Berry's silence.

"We saw the sun god's fiery chariot driven down beyond the pointed firs of Grumpy Mountain," said James Sanger with calm effrontery.

"And, oh, Berry," cried Ferol, her voice deepening, "I saw a fox!"

"So did I," sneered Berry Ward, flicking the match as he tipped the point of his cigarette with a glow. He walked toward the fire and stood looking into the flames, which leaped and danced like a witch's frolic.

CHAPTER XXIV

UP and down Vinegarone Creek were numerous remains of cliff dwellers, caves and cemented fragments of dwellings, filled with heaps of dust and ashes from which might be extracted at any time bits of pottery, parts of sandals, corn shucks and occasionally grooved stones for grinding or polishing implements. Near these dwelling remains was usually a small widening of the canyon, a level place which had served the aborigines for agricultural use, now grown over with shrubs and trees, but occasionally showing still the marks of early use. Bent upon exploring these old dwellings, the entire party started out on horseback one morning, following the narrow trail upstream, stopping to explore clusters or units of ruins as they came upon them, but climbing ever higher, penetrating deeper into the mountain fastness.

Virginia Pitney was especially interested in these remains. She lingered fascinated before the rude pictographs, pointing out the jagged line which pictured the lightning, the rayed circle which plainly said the sun; the rude figures of men, the absurd animals, like a child's drawing.

She could hardly be persuaded to abandon the enticing ash heaps in the rear of the caves, where, by prodding and poking, wonderful discoveries might come to light, of things actually touched and handled by these rude cave dwellers centuries before. She promised herself to come again when the Captain joined the party. She would be free to dig and mess about then as much as she pleased and as long, her husband having an interest in things archeological. But now the party passed on eagerly from one group of dwellings to another, until some one mentioned food, when with one accord they faced about on the trail and dropped down briskly toward camp.

Ferol was following close behind Berry and Jimmy Wagstaff, who led the homeward trek. Single file was required by the narrowness of the trail. Suddenly, before she could see or understand, Berry was off his horse in front of her, kneeling on the ground, his rifle at his shoulder. Bang, bang. Up the side of the mountain sprang the deer, surprised in the depths of the canyon. Ferol watched them fascinated, a firm hand on the rein of her startled horse. How beautiful they were, these soft-coloured creatures, swift and sure-footed. Bang, bang. Jimmy Wagstaff had his turn. The others stopped transfixed in the trail or seriously occupied with trembling horses. Up the side of the mountain streaked the lithe, leaping things, branched antlers and quivering

ears erect, the long-pupilled eyes watchful as the proud, spirited little animals raced for their lives. The shots had not reached them.

Berry sprang upon his horse and was off after them, up the uncharted mountain side at a breakneck pace, crashing through the brush, zigzagging after the deer with mad haste. Ferol watched him with quivering nostrils and glowing eyes. She felt the same wild desire herself to follow, follow. Jimmy Wagstaff was after Berry instantly, calling back as he went, "Don't wait for us. Go on back to camp!"

Ferol sought with sudden insistence for James Sanger. He had been the last in the procession on the trail. He remained now where he had first glimpsed the deer, accurately noting down in the sketch book his memory of the swift-moving legs, the play of the muscles under the delicate coat, the poise and forward rushing movement of the deer, his skilful hand plying the pencil with swift, accurate strokes on the page which he had ripped open as Berry began to shoot.

Mrs. Hill called attention to him gaily, "See, he draws his notebook as the other men pull their guns out of the scabbards and begin to shoot," she cried. Ferol became conscious of his withdrawal from his surroundings—the sudden complete absorption of the artist which she observed for the first time. Only they two had remained on horseback in the trail, the others having got

down variously to wait, to rest or to get a drink. These two remained absorbed yet with what different feelings! Ferol turned her glance from the sculptor with a swift mist of tears before her eyes which passed as it came, but left an accompanying ache in her heart. He had forgotten her. She, who began to feel herself conscious of him in every fibre, drawn irresistibly, had remained beside him unnoticed. His work. She felt a fierce resentment rising which stirred her very depths, rocked her for a moment madly, then left her weak. She slipped to the ground slowly and dropped under a tree, pulling the bridle over the horse's head and leaving him to crop the tender grass all about them.

James Sanger snapped his sketchbook shut and put it in his pocket. He looked about and found Ferol at once under the tree. As he walked toward her, Ferol called to Alice Brace, who came and sat cross-legged beside her looking from Ferol to Sanger in youthful interest. She felt the presence of some element that was disturbing. Ferol's cheeks were red and she was unusually talkative and gay while James Sanger sat silent, watching her covertly. What was the matter with her? The atmosphere was charged with electricity. Some emotion which Sanger did not understand had stirred Ferol.

As they started out on the trail again in single file, Sanger deftly manœuvred Ferol out of the

position she attempted to take between Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Pitney, forcing himself ahead of her and behind these two, and leaving Ferol to bring up the rear. In a little while they had dropped behind and were hidden by an intervening rise. Sanger turned about in the trail, forced his horse close to hers and put his hand on her rein. "What is it?" he asked, his voice roughened by emotion. Ferol tried to pass ahead of him, her cheeks stained with colour, her throat quivering. But he held the rein firmly, got off his horse close beside her. "Tell me, what is the matter? You must!"

Ferol's emotion grew less controlled with this determined mastery. Her lips quivered and she did not try to conceal their trembling as she looked down into his eyes suddenly, showing her own clouded with tears. "Oh," she cried out as though she could not help herself, "I looked for you and you were drawing. I felt so—so lonely!"

In spite of the joy and depth of his feeling at that moment, James Sanger smiled. "You precious!" he said, a tone in his voice which stilled Ferol's aching heart, so that she smiled at herself, laughed back at him through the tears as he kissed her little fingers rapturously. He pressed the fingers to his cheek, then drew them down to where she could feel his heart beating strong and tumultuous.

"You are there, in the depths of my heart.

Don't you know it? You can never be lonely again. You are always there close to me!"

Distant hallooing recalled the stragglers and they hurried perilously to overtake the party. "Loose girth," called Sanger, the man who despised a lie, when he could make himself heard. "Thought you must have met a bear," returned Henry Hill humorously. "Rather expected to ride back and find you both treed."

Ferol crept into the small dressing tent which belonged to her and Berry. She threw herself upon the bedding and pillows in one corner, burying her face in their depths, her hands clasped tightly over her throbbing heart, her body trembling, quivering in unison with her heart. She knew now.

CHAPTER XXV

AS the weeks passed, the intimacy of camp life quickened the emotions of Ferol Ward and James Sanger to unreal proportions. They were rarely separated for long, though seldom alone together. Brief talks snatched on the trail, tender words in swift passing, occasional half hours together, direct benefactions from those about who knew and pitied them.

Since the knowledge of her love for James Sanger had come like a blow over her heart, Ferol had changed. No longer the snatch of song, the bubbling laughter, the happiness glowing in her face. Pain was in her eyes, trouble in her heart, which put a mark upon her countenance. Yet she held her own courageously in the life of the camp, avoiding none, not even Berry. With the passivity which had been characteristically hers until of late, she had her part in the life of the camp. But the flowering time had been blighted; an untimely end of joy had left her still, self controlled and—silent. Every term of endearment whispered by Jim Sanger in passing, wrung her heart afresh; the accidental touch of his hand left a burning spot; the stolen glance of love from his expressive

dark eyes seared her soul. Life to Ferol Ward had become exquisite torture—poignantly sweet and piercingly frightful. She prayed that she might die. She longed to receive a stray shot, fall from her horse, be dragged to death,—any fate rather than yielding. She desired to die before committing another sin. Ferol did not permit the planning of any prolonged time with Sanger but yielded herself to such moments when they came completely, despairingly.

Berry was not well. Since the night he had brought back in triumph to the camp the deer which was to preserve them all from immediate starvation, Berry had appeared to be weakened. Jimmy had had to help him to mount his own horse while he led the other burdened beast to camp. Berry had been too weak to walk, too tired to think in the wave of exhaustion which had followed his chase. Fearing an attack of his trouble, Berry spent the days following upon his back on the canvas-covered bed, reading all the novels to be had, smoking innumerable cigarettes, playing cribbage with Ferol, occasionally joining in a game of Bridge. Captain Pitney had arrived in camp with a visiting brother officer, a young Lieutenant Main, who found his niche immediately as escort for Alice Brace. The Pitneys, with Alice and the Lieutenant, made long excursions to the cliff dwellings and to other creeks where they sometimes spent the night with a rudely devised

camp outfit—the men glad of the toughening and the women proud to be strong enough to share their hardships.

Henry Hill and Jimmy Wagstaff formed themselves into an unfailing commissary; they produced trout and yet more trout when fish was needed. James Sanger fished and tramped and sketched and hunted vainly. He roamed the mountain sides like a distracted giant, rushing back to camp suddenly, fearing to have missed an opportunity for a few words with Ferol. And Mrs. Hill watched, her heart torn with sorrow for Ferol, yet with a confidence too which never wavered. It would come right. She was sure.

But why? Ignorance had built upon ignorance, persistency upon pride, cleverness upon self control, until the place wherein Ferol Ward dwelt might have been compared to a house of cards whose flimsy structure she was just beginning to understand. Ferol stood confronting her life wide awake and fearful. Impelled to fling over everything with a careless touch or destined to go on building with habitual persistency and deepening knowledge, who could tell! Least of all she. No one had drawn upon the store of tenderness in the depths of Ferol's nature since she had left home. All the affection and yearning which had accumulated in her heart lay like pieces of gold in a silken purse, waiting to be spent. She was homesick for loved ones, hungry for love which would

beget love; longing for some one with eyes gifted by deep affection to look down into the hidden dark places of her heart, to divine with sympathetic kindness the faulty construction and strong impulses of her nature, needful of one to reveal a use for these impulses.

The time came inevitably when Ferol and Sanger were alone together upon the top of the cliff above camp. A bare mesa spread over several acres along the top of the rimmed mountain. From this point the view was inspiring, range upon range rising above mountain, jagged teeth of rock standing out above green, velvety forests of pine, splendid depths and heights left by some upheaval from the beginning of things.

Along this mesa at the rim paced Ferol and Jim Sanger, pausing to gaze with unseeing eyes into the depths of the canyon below, down upon the rocky sliding sides falling away from their feet,—talking, talking.

"Of what use are words," Ferol was saying over and over again to herself, "unless I can make him believe."

With all the strength that was his, the driving force of his passion, with the depths of his love, Jim Sanger was pleading. Ferol paused and sat down upon a loose pile of rock with abrupt determination.

"Sit down," she commanded. "Listen to me.

You think you know me. You do not. Let me tell you what I am."

Jim Sanger sat down opposite her where he could look straight into her grey misty eyes. But the eyes began to take on steely lights, to harden. Before his gaze they seemed suddenly to lose their depth, to lessen to cold shallows. His own expression did not change; dogged persistency—it had won out for him all his life. He believed it would win now.

"I know what you are," James Sanger said; "I know you better than you know yourself."

"Oh,—you do not! You do not dream of the change that Berry has brought into my life. No!" as Sanger started to interrupt, "Listen! You must know. I sold myself to Berry. I wanted money for my people. I—I gave myself to him for a price. He was not divorced then. I trusted to his promise,—and he was square. He could not marry me until he got his divorce but I went to him just the same. I could not wait; I had to have help for my folks. As soon as he could, he married me. What was I? Nothing but a green Texas country girl. Poor white trash, that's my stock."

"What do I care for your stock," cried Sanger; "I love you. I know you have belonged to Berry. My God, don't I know it. What d'ye think I'm made of? But what does it matter *when* you first belonged to him? I have given

myself to other women. I don't demand of you what I am unable to give you myself. But I can promise this, no other woman but you will ever know me now. But you! You will not say the same!" He covered his face with his hands; he was shaking.

Ferol held herself tense, fearful that her desire might be stronger than her will; that she would fling herself into his arms in answer to his cry. Presently, when she could control her voice, she continued.

"It isn't that I am not brave enough to go to you. I've got nerve, and—I love you." Ferol's voice became so deep and tender as she spoke that the man caught his breath quickly, thrilled to the heart by the tone. "For me, that's enough. But I can't be a quitter. When I trusted Berry, he made good. He could have dragged me in the dust. I was ignorant, conceited; he could have wrecked my life." Bitterly the words came now, all the shame and pain of her experience revealed. "I didn't know then, but I can see it now. Berry was honest. And now he trusts me. I can't throw him over. I owe him that."

"That's it. You're paying him. Paying him what belongs to me."

Ferol leaned over and touched his hand gently, took the strong, deft fingers into her own. "Jim, don't," she said. "You are hurting yourself too. I've sinned, and I must pay. And I am making

you pay too. I owe this debt—to Berry, to myself, to you even! What could you think of me if I were to give myself again when I know? Ignorance could not excuse me another time. I should loathe myself. I'd come to hating you! Let's keep our self-respect with our love."

Jim Sanger's fingers closed convulsively over hers. He sat looking off into the hazy distance of the forests, his pain so intense that words could not convince him. His eyes were stern and his grasp crushing as he looked again into her face.

"All I know is that I love you and you love me. That creates a new situation. Our love has a right to live. You are crushing your own life, destroying mine, by living with Berry. He would divorce you if you went away from him. We could marry. I am willing to agree to any reasonable arrangement; I do not want you to suffer shame through coming to me. Perhaps Berry might suffer in losing you; your going might even hasten his death. I admit all that. But what is Berry's life compared to ours; to the value to the world of such love as ours? Our children will bring sunshine and laughter and gifts into the world; enrich life itself through the realisation of our love, our dreams. What can your life with Berry bring to the world beyond the profit of an unselfish act—an act barren in itself as to the future? My God, at your age you cannot contemplate going on to the end with such little results.

Take the big things when they come, now while we have life and youth with which to create. You and I, together! God! what can we not do! And you hesitate in pity—yes, pity! Is that stronger than your love? Are you content with sterility?"

"Oh, you are cruel!" Ferol cried out. She was weeping now, slow tears, which were wrung from the depths of her reserve and strong feeling. She sat with both hands squeezed tightly together in her lap, looking at Sanger with wild, wet eyes. She felt as though her hands were beating against a stone wall, that her brain was pounding too. "You—we have so much," she cried, "—our love. Berry has nothing but me. You are cruel to him."

"Cruel? Cruel to Berry? Of course I am," Jim Sanger cried out fiercely. "I could kill him gladly. I could snap him out of existence with my bare hands if by so doing I could get you. But that is not the way. I know that. I don't want to seize you over a dead man's body. I want you to come to me willingly, openly, as free woman to free man, because you cannot stay away."

"I am not a free woman," Ferol protested, her voice thick and colourless. "I can't trample down everything—everybody to come to you!"

"You could if you loved as I love." The man's voice had not lost its note of persistency.

"If I could love you that way, I could leave

you in a year. I should be as destructive as you are. No, that is not the way a woman loves."

Ferol got up wearily. She was cramped and sore as though the conflict had beaten and bruised her body as well as her spirit. Sanger rose too, silently, sternly. They stood for a moment looking down upon the rocks below, cruel, jagged as the fate which offered itself to them. Ferol shivered. "Let us go down," she said.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE struggle going on between Ferol Ward and James Sanger was clear to all those who had eyes to see. Individuals of strong feeling and without artfulness are at small pains to conceal the ravages of suffering. Berry watched them with brooding bitter thoughts and averted eyes. Ferol was suffering. How deeply he could not tell. Toward him she showed the habitual patient thoughtfulness, but her silence after the bubbling loquacity of the past weeks was more eloquent than words. She appeared not to avoid him, yet he had become aware that the usual moments hitherto shared in the small dressing tent were now infrequent. He had not had an opportunity to kiss his own wife for ten days. Berry counted them over many times, ten days. Ferol was not prodigal of kisses at any time, but she had never repulsed him or failed to return his caresses with a gentle tenderness which brought Berry such balm of happiness that usually he thought himself content.

Following the scene upon the cliff, the night threatened rain—dark clouds, menacing peals of distant thunder, occasional bright flashes of light-

ning. Berry had Martin move the canvas-covered beds belonging to him and to Ferol, into the sleeping room of the Lodge. He stood by while Martin placed them, his own directly in front of the open door where he could get the air, and Ferol's over by a window. To sleep indoors after sleeping out is a stifling experience which has to be endured a night or two until one becomes accustomed to the lack of fresh air. The night was not as cold as usual; the air was damp. The others, especially Mrs. Hill, gave some thought to following Berry's example, but the pleasure of sleeping under the trees in the fresh, pine-scented air was too great. Mrs. Hill insisted that she wanted to watch the storm; that it would not rain for several days. Henry Hill gave in grumbling. "Old Lady, when it begins to rain in the middle of the night, I'm going to leave you right here and go inside. Do you hear me?"

Mrs. Hill smiled under the edge of the canvas coverlet which he had just placed about her so tenderly and carefully. "Henry, could you be happy in there with me out here in the rain?" she whispered as her husband crept in under the coverings, beside her. For answer Henry Hill slipped his hand into hers. They lay silent looking up at the lowering clouds, a brooding tenderness and content upon them. Speech was not necessary between these two. Henry Hill understood his wife so thoroughly that he divined her

thoughts at this moment. He knew that she was thinking of Ferol and Berry Ward; anxiously hoping that the night might give them counsel; that this opportunity to be alone together might draw them into closer understanding; devise an offensive armour which they could share together against the peril confronting them.

Ferol crept into her bed by the window with trembling knees. She was exhausted, racked with an ache of heart which included her entire body. James Sanger had returned to camp at supper time with his jaw set in grim determination. He had avoided her glance but she saw that he had not given up. She knew that he was renewing his forces for another struggle. She heard Berry come in and get into his bed rather noisily as though hopeful of disturbing her. But Ferol lay quiet, eyes closed, a great effort at self control subduing her restlessness.

Her mind ranged wide. It soared to the top of the rimmed mountain with the flight of an eagle, and poised there like a bird aware of its victim. She was her own prey. She fell upon herself without mercy, dug up from her heart with ruthless talon the beginning of her life with Berry. This was at once her shame and her secret store of strength. She could never forget that she had sold herself to Berry. It was written in her brain with burning red letters. The shame which she suffered for this act bit into her brain until her

mind seethed. How could she! How could she have done it! What was sickness, death, of all her loved ones compared to this brand of shame upon her now. It was characteristic of Ferol that she did not, even now, blame Berry. She accepted her own responsibility, as she had faced everything in her life, alone. But she no longer felt herself strong to stand against the world. Life was not a simple question of barter and sale, nor yet of give and take as she had once believed. She belonged to Berry now, to society itself. She saw herself not so much as a strong individual able to bend life to her own purposes, as one bound to the circle of existence, whose action impinged upon every other arc of that circle. She felt herself a part of the whole system of construction whereby she dared not displace a brick lest the building itself suffer harm. It was the first time in her life that she had not visioned herself as standing alone—one against the world. She had not depended upon others, so why should the world make demands upon her, demands which threatened to break her on the wheel?

There was Berry's need of her, more vital than any knew save herself. The moral effect of her yielding would be far-reaching. She could think of that too. She touched the points in her mind as she lay there, fearfully controlled, named over those who would suffer by her act. Berry, her people, his—— It was impossible to face the

effect upon them all. Berry's people who loved her, who had been kind; Mrs. Hill, Fanny Hay,—to them her going away with James Sanger would be base betrayal of Berry, that was all. No explanation of a desire to lead an individual, richer life could extenuate an act of cruelty, such as the abandonment of a sick husband. She had accepted her life with Berry, lived it in average content—the content of the unawakened, it is true, until James Sanger came—until she knew! To tear down now was impossible, to demolish with one blow all that she had built of faith and friendship. Faith and friendship—were not these two great factors of life as precious as passion? Love none could take from her. She would have James Sanger's soul mingled with hers forever. This fact none could change. But to give way to this love, to withdraw the barriers imposed, to let it sweep them out into a wide, deep gulf of passion, —what was that but weakness, what but promise of certain final destruction? Surely life would be sweeter held more frugally.

Ferol lay there stifling her sobs under the canvas. Suddenly she felt a touch, a movement beside her. It was Berry. Her heart seemed to cease its beating. She lifted the covering from her ears, fearful, alert.

"Ferol," he whispered, "what is the matter?" He sat down on the edge of her bed and leaned his face down close to hers, whispering so that none

outside could hear. "Ladybird, I can't bear to hear you cry like that. Tell me what is the matter." But Ferol was silent, cowering in fear of his touch, and Berry did not offer to touch her. He leaned close, whispering, trying to soothe her, coaxing Ferol to tell him. Finally her sobbing lessened and she began to regain self control.

"Ferol, do you hate me?" Berry asked.

"No," she whispered back. "Go back to bed, Berry. You will be chilled. I am all right now."

"Ferol, listen to me. I, I—may not live long. Can't you wait?"

Ferol put out one hand and clutched his shoulder. Shame made her cheeks burn in the darkness. "Oh, Berry, don't," she cried softly; "I want you to live. I want you to live."

Though the words were a cry of shame and anguish, still they comforted Berry. He buried his face beside hers in the pillow for a moment, sensing the blessed touch of her arm still about his shoulders. "I love you," he whispered; "I—I can't get on without you, Ladybird."

"I know, Berry, I know," she whispered back, meeting his distress with the tender mothering instinct which had never failed him. "It is all right, dear. It is all right. Go back to bed now." Berry brushed his lips to her cheek, got up and went noiselessly back to his bed. In a few moments she could hear his regular, quiet breathing. He was composed, reassured.

Ferol lay there with one hand pressed to the burning spot on her cheek which Berry's lips had touched. Shame, pity, anguish mingled in her emotion. She lay with wide-staring eyes watching for the glimpses of the door illuminated by lightning flashes, listening for a sound from without, the patter of raindrops. At last she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE hard shower which came with the dawn and left a dripping, rain-drenched greenery for the sun to set sparkling as it shot up over the rimmed mountain, brought forth the first word of home-going. When the rains came it was time to break camp. From this time on the showers would increase daily; heavy electric storms were inevitable as well as dangerous on the trail going home. To be caught in a narrow canyon by the flood from higher mountains was a danger not to be considered lightly, while fording El Rey River during the rainy season might be delayed several hours waiting for the suddenly swollen current to subside. Picking out fishing tackle from wet heaps of canvas, wiping off carelessly exposed guns and saddles, hanging wet bedding on the shrubs and small trees, one and all were active in preparations for going home. First the bedding must be dried, then preparations further extended for packing the horses.

A shadow had fallen upon the camp life with the shower. Everybody was tired of fish and the venison had been consumed. The lust for game was over. Captain Pitney and Lieutenant Main

were approaching the end of their leave. The next day was set for departure. The Hills feared an expected visitor might have arrived prematurely. Alice Brace was confident that Julia had reached Los Mirlos and was expecting her. Jimmy Wagstaff was quite beside himself with joy at the thought and James Sanger grimly echoed the cry that was in the air. Home. Tragedy or shower, some force had touched them all with a desire to flee. It was decided to break camp early the next morning.

When the sun had dried saddle and bridle, and camp had become more comfortable, there was another whimsical movement for an afternoon of riding to the various beloved spots for farewell. But Mrs. Hill thought it wise to save her strength for the trip home, and Ferol, who had no heart for sport or adventure, engaged to remain with her. The Pitneys, Alice and the Lieutenant spoke for a farewell ride to the top of a certain ridge, while Jimmy Wagstaff urged upon Berry a final bout with the trout in a distant pool; and so the plans formed themselves neatly like the play of a kaleidoscope. When Wagstaff and Berry were mounting their horses they looked about for James Sanger, who, it was thought, had silently acquiesced in the fishing arrangement. He was gone. His gun and fishing tackle were in place, but the large sketch book and other working paraphernalia

which he sometimes carried along on his excursions had disappeared.

"Come on, Berry," cried Jimmy Wagstaff, as the latter paused in his departure. "Let him go. He's after some beast. No doubt he's found the lair of the mountain lion and will sit in front of the cave and entertain the brute while he draws its spanking tail. My word, how that man can draw! What a painter he would make if he didn't want to give thickness and form to his creatures. And he can hypnotise the beasts, too. I've seen him hold a black panther in pose by the power of his eye, hold her until he was good and ready to quit. He's first cousin to the wild. Come on. Let's go!"

Berry did not look at Ferol. The colour came up into his pale cheeks a very little and receded, leaving him white and determined. "I'm with you!" he cried, and was off without another word.

Ferol went into the dressing tent and stood very still, hands clenched. She knew where Jim Sanger was. He was up there on the mountain waiting for her. He had not said a word of his intention to her, had not sent a look in her direction, though she had observed him slip out of camp alone. He expected her to follow. Biting her lips nervously, Ferol stood for a moment, then set her jaw grimly. "I will not go," she promised herself with finality. She went out and sat down upon

one of the beds beside Mrs. Hill. They talked a while, desultory remarks, each trying to say some word which would strengthen the determination in Ferol's heart. It was impossible to find a subject which held them, a word which had meaning in their ears. Ferol felt her heart pounding so loud that she feared Mrs. Hill must hear or feel its beating. She got up and stirred about the camp restlessly.

"Shall we go for a walk down the creek?" suggested Mrs. Hill.

"Oh, no. You must not. It would tire you," answered Ferol; "I'm all right—only a little restless." She went back into the tent. She sat down on a camp stool and unstrapped her pumps, slipped her feet into mountain boots and began lacing them up. What was she doing this for, she asked herself. She did not intend to go to James Sanger. Nothing could make her do that. She had decided. She got up and looked at herself in the small mirror hung on the pole of the tent. She adjusted the collar of her middy blouse, secured the pins in her stubborn hair, which the moisture had set to mad curling. She stood for a moment looking down at her boots, still feeling the pounding of her heart, hearing it. She did not intend to go. Ferol saw her boots through eyes filled with unshed tears, fantastic in shape. She put both hands to her cheeks, pressing tightly, her fingers clenched. "Oh, God," she said over

and over again. "Oh, God." And slowly, heavily, she passed out of the tent like one hypnotised, called by a power greater than any she could assert. She walked past the bed where Mrs. Hill lay with a book in her hand, pretending to read. She paused at the head of the bed when she had reached a position where Mrs. Hill's eyes could not reach hers. She saw that Mrs. Hill's hands holding the book were trembling.

"My God, what am I doing?" Ferol cried out to herself. "I am making her suffer too." She stood a moment longer, hesitating. Then without a word she turned and fled along the trail up the creek. She reached the place where she and Sanger had turned off to follow the fox on that first climb to the cliff. She ran through the trees and shrubs, leaping fallen logs, scratching her hands in briars, tearing through the underbrush like a frightened animal. When she reached the place where the tiny footsteps of fox had beaten a trail, Ferol paused breathless, clasping both hands over her heart.

"I'm mad," she muttered to herself, "mad. I can't help it. I must see him. Once. Just once more. This is the last time, forever, forever." She rushed on up the trail. As she mounted higher her pace slowed and her breathing grew laboured. She lagged with footsteps every moment more reluctant, and then a sudden turn in among the rocks which rimmed the mountain, and he was

there, waiting for her. Without a word he took her in his arms. In Sanger's embrace, her beating heart pressed against his own, Ferol was calmed. He had not said a word. She turned her head on his shoulder. She saw that his lips were moving. Was he praying?

Sanger drew away from her that he might look into her eyes. "I had to come," she said involuntarily, her lips curling into a smile, the colour spreading up over her cheeks. He looked over her face, thirsty for her beauty. He looked deep into her eyes, the misty pools which ever lured him but never satisfied.

"Yes, you had to come," he repeated slowly. "I knew. I was sure." They began to climb the trail slowly. It was rocky and wide here; they walked side by side, their arms entwined.

Near the end of the trail they found a niche in the rocks of the rim and sat down in this sheltered place. As though aware of Ferol's excitement and determination, James Sanger began to speak of himself, of his solitary boyhood; his struggle to live, his determination to become a sculptor. He related how these two ruling factors had become his life, shutting out boyhood and youth; maturing him into a forced manhood where he had worked early and studied late, saved from annihilation only by the wonderful physical strength which would not let him perish, nor yet slip back into the easier way.

As she listened, Ferol matched in her mind these struggles with her own. She too had known poverty and the struggle upward, but what a different sort. The easy-going, careless life of her parents; the false pride and sentimentality which sought to cover up real weaknesses of character and achievement with comforting platitudes: all moral somersaults performed in safety upon the firm assurance that what came was by the hand of God. Her surroundings had made Ferol almost as much alone in her struggle up from the depths as James Sanger's. She thought of this great man as a small boy, herself as a red-headed small girl; they two alone, fighting toward each other! How those great dark eyes must have pleaded for that boy; his intelligence and quick hands arrested the attention of the painters and sculptors who had given him crumbs of attention; his genius finally compelled a closer attention to the personality of the waif at the door. For her benefit Jim Sanger described his difficult storming of adverse fate; then Europe, third class, with barely money enough to get him started in a foreign land. The battle had begun all over again in Paris, but with growing hope and widening opportunity. He told her of the wonderful awakening interest of the master sculptor, the working chance in the great man's studio which gave Sanger the surroundings and associations which he craved, and, a little later when his undoubted

talent had become known, the sincere interest and assistance which finally gave his genius wings. The years in Rome were recalled, Paris again, the coming of buyers for his remarkable and compelling works; made sociétaire of the Beaux-Arts Salon, and finally the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour, prestige in the art world at last! Sanger sketched it all briefly for her to see, touching the dark places ruthlessly, the brighter spots with a light, yet truthful, attention, which made Ferol know that he wished to share his triumphs with her as they never before had been shared. He brought them all, struggles and successes, and laid them at her feet. And then he took her clenched hand, uncurled it with his gentle fingers, and lifted it to his lips.

"That is all," he said. "I have been coming toward you. Without you these things are nothing; my struggles vain. We shall go to Paris. You will like the studio life. It will give you the freedom to develop your own talents. You will soon make your place there too. Together we will work and play. We will taste life from the fountain head of happiness and grow to our full statures." He stood up and lifted Ferol gently to her feet. She stood facing him, trembling. He spoke earnestly, deeply moved, revealing the depths of his love—his desire to cherish her. When he ceased to speak he looked down at her

tenderly. He drew her closer into his sheltering arms.

"Ferol," he said, "you will come?" For answer Ferol rested her head against his breast, shivering. He was unmoved. He took the fingers away which concealed her tear-drenched eyes, he forced her to look at him, drew her face close to his, his arms about her.

"I must have you, belovedest," he said quietly, firmly. "You belong to me, don't you know that?" She returned his look of love with one singularly tense, yet tender.

"Jim," she said, "my heart is all yours. You know that. There never will be another—only you. I need you too. I don't see how I can live without you close beside me, but—I—I can't. I can't—that's all!"

Noting the dawning pain and terror in his eyes, Ferol loosened herself from his grasp, quickly mounted the rocks to the mesa and stood alone on the rim edge. Sanger followed her, a look in his eyes which gripped her with sudden fear, fear of losing him forever, fear for him; what was her will against his! Determination shaped James Sanger's movements; madness was in his eyes. He rushed to her, seized her by the shoulders, seemed for a moment as though he would shake her, but before the words which were on his lips found utterance, Ferol flung herself into his arms, abandoned herself to him with sudden passion, her

lips quivering up to his, her eyes drawing him down with the power of pools of mystery, depths of promise. Close in his embrace, Ferol cried out, "Oh, I love you. I love you. Take me in your arms and fling me over the edge down into the trees and rocks. Crush me, destroy me, but love me!"

James Sanger picked her up in his arms and held her cradled there, looking into her glowing, yearning face, his own countenance puckered with pain; the lines all drawn taut as though held in the tight, aching clutch of his heart.

"Will you come?" he asked again.

"No. No. I will not!" She knew herself bruised, crushed, beaten. Yet no doubt assailed her; death offered her peace. It was the victory of the spirit; the power of the soul which had winged itself for flight in those short years of swift development This was Ferol's moment of power.

Sanger began to run along the trail edging the cliff, hoarse sounds issuing from his throat, a mighty throbbing, a sensation of bleeding in his heart, which weakened him, made him run panting for breath. He ran for a while as though he would never stop, as though the trail never again would be repassed by them. His wonderful strength made him superb. Finally he stopped, captured by a thought. He looked down upon the flushed face and tender eyes of the woman in his

arms. No fear was there. He kissed her lips, crushed her mouth against his own, pressed her against his breast, with a sudden fury, tore open the collar of her blouse and covered her breast with a passion of kisses. He was sobbing, a mighty giant in the throes of suffering, his tormentor a wisp of down in his arms.

"I am going to kill you," he cried.

"Yes, yes," Ferol answered, weeping too.

Sanger's face was seamed with anguish as he looked at her. He cried out in agony, "What would I do without you? How could I live? I will die with you. We will go over the cliff together, you in my arms, thus!"

He clasped her to him again and stumbled toward the edge. Below, several hundred feet, a stream looked through the dry, clear air, like a bright silvery thread. No sound of its tumultuous passing over boulders reached those two high above. The man stood poised at the rim, looking down on the woman in his arms, not at the depths below. Her eyes never wavered, but answered his.

"Now," she breathed, "I love you."

Slowly the man turned back and stood for a moment with his burden held close, looking up at the mountain ranges, rising still higher back of the cliff; the blue cloud-dappled sky, so clear, so flawless just above. Beads of sweat stood out on his brow; his mouth was twitching, his nostrils

quivering. With a groan, Jim Sanger stumbled to his knees, resting Ferol upon the ground.

"God! I can't. I can't," he muttered. He threw himself full length upon the ground, sobbing. And Ferol knelt beside him, her face with the glory quenched. Why had he failed? She was ready, eager. Ferol looked at the great, trembling form; she bent over it with tender, pitying eyes. "Jim," she said, "Jim, shall I do it alone? I can." The man grasped her hand convulsively. He controlled himself by a great effort. Presently he got up, drawing Ferol near, looking into her dear face.

"No," Sanger said brokenly, "I can't let you. I want you. I mean to have you. When I thought of crushing the life out of us down on those rocks, of us two, alive, strong, full of vigour,—I could not. It would be wasteful! To destroy you, to let you die! You, my own! Never. I can't even hate you for standing out against me. What right have you to oppose me? How dare you!" He gripped her shoulders painfully, then loosened his hold and turned away as though mortally weary.

"No. Go. As long as I live I will wait for you, hope for you, long for you. I shall never be near you again, until you are free. Go!"

Ferol stood looking at him stricken, but her determination unaltered. The last rays of the sun glinted on her bright hair. Its glancing, gleam-

ing light enveloped her white, tortured face, the reddened throat and breast where her blouse fell away, wrecked and torn. Sanger looked her over passionately, devouringly, then turned and plunged down the rocky, broken side of the mountain away from the direction of the camp. He passed out of the rocky stratum into the underbrush. Ferol stood motionless until the sound of his unheeding flight through the shrubs and tangle of brake and fern, over stones and tree trunks, had died away. Then she threw herself face downward upon the ground and lay there prone, too exhausted, too grief-stricken, to utter a sound, to shed a tear.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT was approaching supper time when Ferol dragged her languid footsteps into the camp. She went past the groups by fire and supper table, into the tent before she could be stopped. She slipped a sweater on over her blouse and was rearranging her hair in front of the mirror mechanically when Berry came into the tent. He looked at her critically, noting the dark shadows beneath her eyes, the white lips which looked as though sealed in death. In a quick glance Berry realised that she had passed through a crisis, some frightful experience which had left her suffering, without strength for self-control. At once he sought to protect her.

"You're tired out," he said briefly, dryly; "don't you want me to fetch you a cup of coffee?"

Ferol opened her lips to speak, but suddenly collapsed in a heap on the pile of bedclothes. She lay there weak, wordless. Berry went out and toward the fire. With the curt explanation that Ferol had a stiff headache, he went back with the cup of coffee, his stern eyes and ivory white face so curiously old and worn in the shadowed, flickering, fire-lighted twilight.

Berry sat down beside Ferol on the ground, forcing her to drink the coffee as he put the cup to her lips and held it there. He had never seen Ferol in such a weakened condition. Her hands trembled as she sat shivering, her sweater fastened up close about her throat. She looked at Berry piteously, as though imploring to be relieved of questioning. When the coffee had revived her somewhat, she asked, "Are our beds still in the Lodge?" Berry answered, "Yes. I will go with you."

They passed around between the intervening tents, so as to avoid the groups at the fire and supper table, and went into the Lodge. Ferol threw herself upon her bed, her eyes closed. Almost at once she seemed to be asleep. Berry came near her and stood looking down into her haggard face. How she was suffering! His own nerves were raw-edged and fraying; a feeling of doom had clamped itself upon Berry's spirit so that he was reminded wretchedly of the walls of a coffin. His coffin—it had begun to close in around him like a torturing room with shifting walls and yawning pit. He went out and ate his supper, jesting grimly, laughing without mirth, holding his own against those who loved and pitied him, against whom he felt a savage resentment. They went to bed finally, how slowly only Berry could have told, as he sat hugging his knees by the fire. His forbidding aspect prevented

questioning. "Why does he not go to bed?" Mrs. Hill perplexed herself vainly; "he needs the rest for to-morrow's ride." Berry was usually one of the first about the camp fire ready for bed, his slight strength waning with the full day, but to-night he sat grimly, silently—waiting.

The fire was at the furthest point from the sleeping place. It had been purposely placed where the boulders and logs at the stream edge might be of service for seats. It was somewhat withdrawn from the camp, secluded at night from the eyes of those lying in the canvas-covered beds scattered about. Once Berry got up and went into the Lodge. Ferol was sleeping. She still lay with her clothes on, relaxed and still. Berry drew a blanket over her, then went back to his vigil by the fire.

As the first faint streaks of light from the dawn were becoming visible over head, James Sanger came quietly into camp. He was leading his horse. Berry sat motionless, watching him. Sanger put his saddle on the horse, fastened his gun in place, and began quietly to put his sketching books and apparatus in a compact heap with fishing tackle and war bag on his tarpaulin-covered bed. Finally he had them all together, then went over to the Dutch oven and took therefrom meat and biscuits, stuffing his pockets full. He gave a swift look around the camping place, took pencil and small notebook from his pocket

and went over toward the fire. He came upon Berry Ward sitting there. Sanger stopped short. The two men eyed each other in the wan, flickering light. Then Berry threw out a hand in gesture of invitation.

"Come on, Sanger," he said in a low voice; "I've been waiting for you."

James Sanger walked reluctantly toward the fire. He looked down at this man in the cold faint dawn. Why didn't he kill him now and get it over with, he questioned himself grimly. He made no effort to conceal the antagonism of his expression. He sat down and wrote his note composedly, folded it, restored the pencil and notebook to his pocket. He regarded the other coldly.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked with blunt direction.

Berry Ward returned his gaze with equal composure and unflinching dislike in his eyes. Thus both sat in the dim dawn, bared of superficialities, forgetful of conventions, man to man, with hate striking flame in the flint of their glances.

"Sanger," said Berry, after a moment's pause, "you are in love with my wife." James Sanger's expression did not change; his lips hardened perhaps, but the light revealed only the graven face unchanged.

"What of it?" he asked curtly.

Berry leaned forward and threw a pine knot on the glowing embers. It flickered for an in-

stant, then shot up into sudden flame, licking the darkness with sibilant tongue, pointing and revealing these two men to each other. With hard eyes they stared.

How like Berry it was to call his hand, James Sanger was thinking. A smile twisted his face. It was Berry's turn to feel the warm tide of excitement suddenly sweep the colour up into his face as he asked, "Are you going to take her away with you?"

Sanger's lips were so dry that he had deliberately to moisten them before he could speak, and there was a throbbing in his heart like the beating of wings. "She won't go with me," he said finally.

Berry Ward's heart leaped, then was stilled. He exulted for a moment in Ferol's pride, her strength, her poise, as he always had. In moments of stress, Ferol showed all the fine traits of blood to which he supposed she had no right by inheritance. Yet what a thoroughbred! He came back with a jerk to his own problem, to the man before him.

"So you are going away without her," said Berry slowly. "Is it final?"

James Sanger got up and turned brusquely away from his questioner, his hands thrust nervously into his pockets. He walked a few steps, then faced the other man again with a bitter expression of defeat.

"I'm trying to take my medicine, Berry, but don't expect me to swear I'll not smash the bottle if I get the chance. I make no promises. I'd take her if I could. Damn it, I can't and you know it. Do you want to gloat?" He advanced menacingly.

Berry's nervous fingers were busy rolling a cigarette. He laughed queerly. His blue eyes were bright with excitement, perhaps with a touch of fever. "Don't get excited," he said. Then more calmly, "That was not my purpose. I wanted to know your plans. I knew you'd tell me the truth. Now I will tell you mine." He ran his fingers crisply through his brush of fair hair. His voice was not altogether under his control when he spoke again. It sounded small and far away.

"Ferol loves you."

James Sanger turned swiftly toward the other, his glance keen, searching. But Berry lighted a cigarette and took a puff before continuing.

"I suppose she's told you how I won her and you think I'm a damned blackguard. Well—I don't care what you think. I was bound to have her. I'd had everything else in my life that I'd wanted. I wanted her right, but I took her the only way I could get her." Berry was looking, not at the man to whom he was speaking, but into the heart of the fire where the embers glowed with a bluish flame under the stimulus of the pine knot. His voice sank lower as he continued: "I found

when I had her that—what I wanted had slipped through my fingers. She doesn't love me," he paused, "never did. If I thought I could make her love me, you couldn't come within a mile of her. I'd stop at nothing. I'd kill you, big brute that you are, if I had to do it from ambush." Berry's long, flexible fingers jerked spasmodically. And James Sanger stood arrested, motionless, struck by the other man's conflicting and poignant emotions.

Berry threw away the half-burned cigarette, got up, took out the small book of cigarette papers, preparing to roll another. Suddenly he flung the book in the fire and walked a step or two toward Sanger. "God, man, I'd give the rest of my life to hear her say——" he broke the sentence abruptly and made a great effort to pull himself together. He sat down upon a log. From a pocket his searching, nervous fingers brought forth a leather cigarette case. He lighted a cigarette.

"She doesn't. She never will," Berry continued in a dull, flat tone. "For the rest of my life I'm up against it. I've mastered everything, even this damned disease. I've kept it down. I could go on fighting it if I had a goal. But——" he stopped, choked with emotion. When he could control his voice, Berry said evenly, with a cold, bitter smile upon his lips, "I'm going to withdraw in your favour, Sanger."

The dawn was streaking the east now, shedding

a pale light upon the camp, the tense figures of the men, the dying fire. They had spoken in low tones, not easily heard a few feet away. The camp slept. Berry leaned his back against a tree and watched the spiral rings of smoke which he blew from his mouth, slowly, deliberately. He did not look at the other man's face. Sanger sat down heavily. His figure sagged in a relaxed heap on another log, and for a moment he hid his face in his hands. "Berry," he said weakly, when he had mastered his emotions, "you're mad."

Berry's answering smile was the merry one of his gayest moods. "Not mad, but bad, you mean. I've played at everything in life. I'm a born gambler. I staked on winning Ferol. I've lost. But I'm going to be a good loser. She shall have her chance, by God," he continued savagely. "I know the rules of the game and I play to lose this time."

Sanger sat staring before him, his hands relaxed. Berry watched him now with critical eye and keen search. He spoke briefly and to the point. "You go on to New York. She will follow. I give you my word she will be free within six months."

Sanger started up as though the springs of life had been renewed suddenly. He started to speak but hesitated. Berry would not let him utter the words.

"Do not ask me how. Just trust me."

"Without injury to yourself," the other interposed firmly, his voice taking on a keen edge.

"Injure myself! Gods! How could I injure myself! I don't have to. Her going away will be excuse enough, and——without scandal," he continued suavely. "Will you go?"

Sanger looked at Berry Ward earnestly, almost enviously. The high spirit and courageous front of the other appealed to his imagination, fired his hero-loving soul. He got up. Berry rose too, and stood before the fire, nervously flicking the ash from the end of his cigarette. The two men eyed each other covertly for a moment, then suddenly their hands shot out toward each other and were joined in a firm handclasp. They looked deeply into each other's eyes for an instant, then Sanger, with glowing eyes, a white flame of passionate idealisation flaring into his face, said in deep, stirred tones, "You win, Berry. This is your victory, not mine!"

A sleeper stirred in the camp. The dawn had come. With relentless, ready fingers, Nature lifted the curtain of a new day. The two men moved awkwardly, drew away from each other as though shamed by the intrusion of the light of day upon their deep, inner emotions. Then the cook stirred in bed yawning.

With swift movements, James Sanger secured his pencilled note to the big pine tree, under which stood the rude table of boards which constituted

the dining room. He fastened it where all could see Jimmy Wagstaff's name written in large letters. With a quick movement he was on his horse. As James Sanger started down the trail, he turned for a last look at the man standing alone beside the fire. Berry met his look with a swift gesture, half farewell, half promise, one hand held high. Berry Ward stood when the other man had passed out of sight among the trees, stood there facing the dawn with haggard eyes and riven countenance.

The cook sat up in bed blinking, rubbing his eyes. The horse wrangler near by awoke. Berry moved like a phantom toward the Lodge. He slipped in at the door and flung himself upon his bed. Ferol still slept.

CHAPTER XXIX

SAN VINCENTE welcomed the returned campers with an ardour wholly short of their own. The camping expedition had been perfect, the party protested, but—each and all were glad to be at home again. With bold front they put forward the excuse of a telegram recalling James Sanger to New York, in explanation of his return twenty-four hours before the others. This story was plausible in the face of the sculptor's immediate departure from town. Before the camping party had reached San Vincente, James Sanger was gone.

Ferol went into the familiar living room at Meadowlark and looked around. A feeling of peace reacted upon her as she stood looking about at the familiar surroundings, the comfortable chairs by the open windows, the birds calling from the cedars without, the familiar objects upon the table, the marble Venus on the dark upper shelf of the long bookcase, the brilliant impressionistic painting of a desert sunset, signed J. Wagstaff, the framed photograph of Stuck's Laughing Faun. All the dear familiar possessions of her home seemed to meet her eagerly, to

soothe her aching heart and nerves. Had she dreamed the camping trip, the whole frightful experience of the jagged, cruel high country up there where El Rey River had its source?

She put out her hand impulsively toward Berry as he came into the room and paused beside her. "Oh, Berry, it is good to be home again, isn't it," she said.

An expression of suffering passed over Berry's face, passed and left it bleak. "Are you truly glad?" he asked. Ferol did not answer him. She began to remove her riding things, bent over her spurs and busied herself with unlacing her high boots. Presently she went into her bed room and Berry threw himself full length upon the leather couch. He lay there listening to Ferol's movements in the next room, his tired body relaxed, his head throbbing. He was torn with conflicting emotions, wretched in his own secret misery. Ferol's patient acceptance of Sanger's departure, her steadfast attitude of acceptance and resumption of the old life, shook Berry's faith in his power to keep his promise. A wan, pale vision of Ferol, it was to be sure, but none the less, her blessed personality was there, close beside him, still his own.

The weeks which followed gave back to Berry the sense of loss which had strengthened him into the decision of self-sacrifice. It was true that Ferol was there in body, in truth his. She would

look into his eyes with a strange expression of remoteness, a lack of recognition, almost, which would contract Berry's heart with a grasping pain. She came and went, resolute and still, but the look in her eyes wrung the hearts of those who loved her, most of all Berry. Never had Ferol been more silent, never more gentle and kind.

Berry had not been at home a month before he announced that he was going back to the Lodge. Nobody encouraged him in the idea. His immediate friends scoffed at him frankly. This was not the time to be in the mountains. The dangers of flooded fords, the drenching rains,—every one urged him to wait until the hunting season was open. Berry delayed.

And so the summer passed. Ferol aged during these months of self-repression and rigid routine. At times she was half mad to get away; to have a few weeks, a month, to herself, away from everybody whom she knew; time in which to get back her poise and to renew her power of self-control. But mindful of Berry's generosity, his protection at a time when self-control had forsaken her completely, when it had seemed that her mind would become unhinged, Ferol held herself in check. Ferol's knack of brushing aside unimportant details and going straight at the vital issue made her act clearly even when she suffered most. She was conscious of some especial reason why she

should remain near Berry. Whenever her mind sped on wings to James Sanger, Ferol's consciousness suddenly jerked her back into the familiar home surroundings with a controlling sense of disaster. Both her thoughts and her presence were needed to cope with this fleeting, yet urgent spectre. She watched Berry carefully for some sign, some clue to this uneasiness which slowly but determinedly attached itself to her. It became her companion by night and by day, yet she could see no reason for anxiety. Only a keen student of psychology could have made this obsession clear to Ferol Ward. The fine nervous system which always she had had under such perfect control, led her now into strange fancies. She became beset with an anxiety in regard to Berry's health. But Berry laughed at her fears, which he misconstrued into remorse, awakening conscience:

The pleasant social life had been resumed with the rides and drives, picnic suppers under the soft, illuminating beauty of the New Mexico moonlight, silvery, white nights full of mystery and romance. Bridge Club attendance was unbroken and morning parties took the place of afternoon functions. Julia Brace had returned with a trunk full of charming new frocks, which she invented occasions to display. Every one was entertaining Alice Brace. Captain Hay seemed to grow stronger, could even go for an occasional drive, and the Hills had an attractive young

nephew as guest, just out of college and full of eagerness and enthusiasm for the western country. Life waxed full and varied and, but for the torturing of hearts and minds, for the Wards, apparently content.

Days passed in which Berry forgot, when his purpose slipped from him, his wound of misery healed over, only to be reopened with renewed pain; times when he cursed himself for a fool; days when he glimpsed the heights of self-sacrifice. From heights to depths he passed with sickening, incredible swiftness, wrecking his peace of mind, harrying his worn nerves, destroying his very existence. Some stimulus from the outside must have been necessary in order to bring him to the pitch of determination in which he had parted with James Sanger. It came at last, trivial in itself, but significant.

Entering the living room one day, Berry found Ferol standing with her back to the room, looking out upon the browning, distant hills, a newspaper clutched tightly in one hand, the other pressed against her heart. At the sound of movement in the room, Ferol turned from the window, revealing tear-filled eyes, wet cheeks, a sort of wild anguish in her face, which brought Berry to a sudden pause. Ferol threw the crumpled paper from her to the table and swept by Berry without a word. She went into her room, locking the door behind her. And then silence.

Berry picked up the crushed paper and searched its columns for the cause of this disturbance. It was a *New York Sunday Times.* In the foreign section under a date line from Paris, among the notes and announcements, were two small lines which jumped to meet his eye.

"James Sanger, the sculptor, has gone to Algiers for the winter."

That was all. But it was the first word Ferol had had of Sanger. The brief announcement of his movements had been enough to stir the depths of her emotion, to renew the hunger of longing in her heart. She had fasted so long, been without word of his whereabouts, sign of his existence. A woman renews the wells of her emotional life by tokens—a word, a glance, a letter—finally a name in the columns of a newspaper—any one of these trivial happenings go to keep her secret inner happiness alive.

Berry put down the paper with a stifled groan. It had come. Four months of his promised six had gone. He must face the opportunity now when it came. He had still the strength of soul to face the fulfilling of his promise.

For a long time that bright October morning Berry Ward sat by the fire, in the warm sunshine-filled room, smoking, thinking steadily. He faced the end with resolution, stifling the ache of his hungry heart. He had passed six months

without an acute attack of his trouble. This was a rare occurrence. Berry Ward knew the wretched disease which racked him; knew the power of resistance which he had raised to withstand the enemy; he knew also the weakness of those defences. Little by little his lung tissue was breaking down. A few days of high fever, a hemorrhage easily checked, a period of rest and renewal: these attacks never ceased to return to their work of destruction. Berry had counted on that persistence, almost regularity. With his secret hugged close to his heart, he carried out his plans.

Without laying himself open to subsequent suspicion, Berry wrote to his lawyer in New York, reassured himself as to the wording of his will, put his affairs in order. Such precautions were necessary and reasonable in view of the usual autumn hunting trip. His illness had given him a habit of life, always to be prepared.

The autumn hunt was one which the women frequently did not care to share because of the hardships. Ferol herself did not desire to join the party, nor any of the other women. She tried to dissuade Berry from going. The trip up to the hunting lodge was so extremely fatiguing; deer hunting the most strenuous of sports in that rough wild country.

Ferol seldom interfered with Berry's plans.

She never demanded his presence or company at an especial time. If he liked to remain with her, Ferol made him welcome, but the demands which love makes upon love were unknown to their ménage. Yet on this occasion Ferol reversed the rule. She urged Berry not to go.

"You aren't quite up to scratch, Bunch," she begged, on the evening preceding the departure. "Stay at home and hunt quail with me." Ferol was trying to conceal her anxiety, careful not to let Berry know lest he refuse from childish petulance of some fancied attempt at control. Berry was like that. As Ferol phrased it herself, it was necessary to handle Berry. She went at her unusual attempt with less than the usual tact, urged by her unwonted nervousness.

They were sitting by the fire on that last evening. The night was cold. A roaring fire of logs lit up every corner of the room. Berry had spent a strangely restless evening. He had cleaned his favourite gun, played a game or two of cribbage with Ferol, read a page or two of a New York paper, gone from one thing to another with a surface glimpse from time to time of a strong undercurrent of thought, a preoccupation of mind which he tried to conceal. But now he abandoned himself to certain poignant emotions which he was at no pains to conceal.

"Ladybird, shall you miss me?" he asked, holding out a thin, white hand toward his wife. "Don't

you really want me to go? I—I thought perhaps, just now——"

Ferol would not let him say words which she felt would be painful to them both. "Stay, Berry, stay," she urged. Berry leaned back in the leather-covered chair and closed his eyes, still holding tight to Ferol's hand. Her words made him very happy. Just for a moment he allowed himself to drift into the warm, peaceful thought of it. He would not go. James Sanger—Sanger—well, James Sanger be damned. If he and his own wife chose to work out their own problem in that way, it was their affair. Not even James Sanger could interfere. The effect of this reasoning was so sweet that Berry remained for a time with closed eyes, tasting the blessed thought to the uttermost, extracting from it a balm which healed the wounds of the past months. Slowly he opened his eyes. He looked into the fire, then at Ferol. She was sitting straight, her body rigid, her eyes looking straight into the bright flame with unwinking fixity as though she were blind. About her lips were lines, lines which he had not noticed before. The shape of her mouth had changed; the tender curve of the Cupid's bow, which had so fascinated Berry when first he knew the marvels of her lips, had gone. Her mouth had settled into a straighter line; the vivid colouring of the lips had ceased to invite his passing glance. How Ferol had suffered! It had changed her

from child to woman. This wretched summer had crushed the joy and tenderness from her as completely as the frost singed the flowers. She was patient. But that hurt Berry most.

Ferol became conscious of his gaze. Slowly she masked the yearning in her eyes, the hunger in her heart, which found expression in her face, and turned toward Berry with a slow smile. She pressed his fingers with her own, "You will stay?" she asked. Berry pulled her toward him, took her in his arms in the ample chair, rested his cheek against hers and said nothing. Presently he shivered, or perhaps he was trembling. Ferol looked into his eyes. They were wet, red-lidded, but Berry smiled. With swift contrition, she kissed him on the cheek. Her heart beat nervously and she felt constrained to flee. Instead she compelled herself to resume her position in his arms, "Dear old Bunch," she whispered in his ear, "it is all right. You'll stay at home with me."

CHAPTER XXX

A SOUND by her bedside awoke Ferol the next morning. Berry was standing there fully dressed in his hunting clothes, the door leading to the screened sleeping porch was open, the windows wide, letting in the keen frosty morning air. The sun had not yet risen. Ferol sat up in bed in surprise. "What are you doing?" she asked. "Why, Berry, I thought you weren't going!"

Berry sat down on the edge of the bed and put his arms around her. She shivered. Berry drew back for an instant, but a glance at the open windows and doors seemed to reassure him. He drew a heavy bathrobe about Ferol's shoulders and cuddled her close in his arms for a moment. He did not speak. Ferol drew away from him with determination. She took hold of the lapels of his coat and shook him slightly. "Oh, Berry," she begged, "don't go!"

Berry caught hold of her shoulders, gripped her with a sudden intensity, and looked straight into her eyes. "If you can tell me that you love me with all your heart and soul, I will not go," he said. His eyes menaced her; they dared her to tell the truth. Ferol turned away, faltered, put

her hand to her throat, but Berry pressed her unmercifully for an answer. None was needed, but Berry's own particular devil of persistency drove him to force from her words which he dreaded to hear. "Tell me," he reiterated savagely.

Ferol's mouth hardened, her eyes flashed steely points as she looked at him with a determination as flinty as his own, but before the pain of his expression her own anger was suddenly stilled. Very tenderly she returned his glance now. Looking into each other's eyes words were unnecessary. Berry's resolution collapsed. He let go of her shoulders, turned away with a groan, but Ferol caught his arm. "You will stay, Bunch?" she pleaded.

Berry got up, his expression stern, in the early light. "I'm going," he said grimly. He would have gone without another word, but Ferol held him back, caught his hand again, with a determination which amazed even herself. "Bunch," she urged in that velvety, deep tone which compelled Berry Ward to turn toward her in despair, his arms outstretched.

"I've got to go, Ferol, but I love you, never forget that." He crushed her in a fierce embrace, kissed her on the lips again and again, threw her from him back among the pillows and rushed from the room. Before Ferol could get into her bathrobe and out to the door, he was gone, his horse's hoofs striking the frozen earth with a quick, me-

tallic ring. Ferol crept back to her bed. She lay there with the sound of those hoof beats in her ear, a prey to anxiety which she could not stifle.

But the hunters were a merry party when they arrived at Vinegarone Lodge on the evening of the third day thereafter. Martin was expecting them, fires were roaring in the fireplaces of both rooms, the odor of cooking called them invitingly to a meal. Martin reported deer close to the Lodge. The weather promised to be cold and clear. An early start was planned for the following day and the men tumbled into the rudely constructed beds, and were asleep at once, tired and happy. Not so Berry Ward. He lay for an hour watching the flicker of the flame shadows on the rafters. He was thinking of James Sanger, of that last talk by the dying fire. He felt that he would never sleep again.

From the first day on the hunters had good luck, all but Berry. Deer there was in abundance but Berry was shooting wild. He was chaffed for his failures. Instead of taking such remarks with true sportsmanlike indifference or with a sharp return of words, which Berry usually found so easy, he grew morose and silent until the others ceased to jest at his expense. Old Berry had a grouch on, they concluded—best to let him alone.

At the end of a fortnight the men began to go home. But Berry refused to budge. He had not yet killed his deer.

"Ah, go on, Berry," cried Gregory Worthington, placing with great care a handsome head with heavy antlers upon the back of a horse; "you could have killed a deer any day if you had wanted to. What the devil's the matter with you, anyhow. Get your traps together and come along. Ferol will be worried to death if we leave you to come in alone." But Berry remained firm. He waved them a farewell as they passed down the trail, an expression of black despair in his face, which followed Greg Worthington, haunted his memory all the way in.

And Berry himself. With what emotions he watched the last of his friends pass down the trail out of sight, none could know ever. When they had disappeared in the brush along the creek, he stumbled forward and held out one hand as though to call them back, but the sound of Martin coming out of the Lodge made him exercise a swift control. He went in and threw himself upon the hard bed. He was tired, mortally weary from the hard riding which he had shared to the limit of his ability to stay on a horse. Each night of his return to camp had found him exhausted, but the following morning he had dragged himself out into the frosty air, mounted his horse with shaking knees to ride, ride, shoot, shoot, shoot, carefully aiming high. Berry had been in no mood to kill. Now he was exhausted and sore. There was a sharp pleurisy pain in his side; he had got that in the cold

wind two days before. His lips were dry with fever. His head whirled, made spiral turns, long loops, then began to go up and down. Somebody was playing diablo with his head. He lay there on the bed muttering. Martin made him some broth from the venison in the middle of the day, but he could not eat. All afternoon he remained inert, burning with fever, on the verge of delirium, half in stupor, and without interest in his surroundings. That night he slept and awoke feeling stronger, more composed. He got up and wandered about the Lodge. He tried to read, but the returning fever blurred his vision. Often he put his handkerchief to his lips, then looked at it expectantly. He looked into his war bag, took out certain boxes, small bottles, boxes, a flask; looked at them carefully, then put them back into the bag one by one. He lay down on the bed again. Martin came and went, tending the fire, regarding him stolidly. The man did not annoy with questions, to Berry's great relief, but remained in the kitchen, coming to the bedroom only when it was necessary.

The third day Berry felt better. He fancied his fever was less, and sat up in bed with pillows piled under his shoulders, lost himself for a time in an old novel some one had left behind. In the middle of the morning he called Martin in from the other room. As the man came in, Berry hastily thrust his handkerchief under the pillow.

"Martin," he said, "I'm better to-day. You can ride down to the Red Barn and get that sack of flour you need. Get back by to-morrow night if you can, but if you're held up by the rain, it doesn't matter. I shall be able to get along until then—longer if necessary." Martin looked at the white face of the man, the shadowed eyes and blue lips. "I kin git along," he said briefly.

"Well, so can I," answered Berry curtly, "and I want you to get some whisky for me, and tobacco." He held up a half empty tin box, to show, "That's all I've got. I'll be a raging lunatic if I don't have tobacco, and I think the fellows cleaned out the last of the whisky. A good stiff drink would brace me up."

Martin pondered. "I reckon that's the truth," he admitted, "but I don't like to leave you here alone at night. Them logs ain't any too easy to lift." But Berry urged and insisted. Martin piled up wood by the two fireplaces, put the broth on in an iron pot, simmering, and set the coffee pot near the coals. He left plenty of biscuits in the Dutch oven on the warm white wood ashes. Before he started Martin came to the door and stood for a moment looking at the sick man.

"Want I should telephone to town while I'm there?" he asked dryly.

"Telephone, what for?" returned Berry with that forbidding aspect which he knew so well how to assume. But Martin was unperturbed.

"Thought ye might want a doctor or yer wife to come up an' nurse ye," he said.

"Bring me some whisky and the makin's, that's all the nursing I want," growled Berry.

Martin went out shaking his head. He didn't like the looks of the sick man, but "orders was orders," he reflected, and Berry Ward was a man to be obeyed. He turned his horse into the downward trail. He had a ten-hour ride before him, and the moon was bran new and about as useful as a new-born babe. He must cross the Slick Rocks before dark.

And the sick man within the cabin listened to the fainter sounds of hoofs upon stone and muffling turf until they ceased altogether. He was alone. Alone. He would never see again the face of a human being. Not on this earth. Berry smiled grimly as he wiped the stain of blood from his lips. He had not much hope of another world than this. He lay there sensing his aloneness. Never to see another face. Never to see Ferol again. He choked, and brought up a mouthful of blood. Berry was assailed suddenly by fright. The sight of all that blood swept every thought of loneliness and longing from his mind, to make way for the great white fear which settled down upon him with cold and clammy touch. Another mouthful. He started up in bed impelled to shriek to the man out of hearing down the canyon. Martin. If only he had not let him go! Berry put one

foot out of bed in an involuntary effort to go to his war bag for the remedies. His war bag. He looked at it. In that coarse flour sack with the faded print of once rosy lettering of Queen of the Kitchen flour, in that helpless sprawling and lifeless piece of cloth, lay his remedies. A few steps, a swift searching with one hand and he would be back in bed again, flat on his back, the remedies safe at hand where he could use them at need. He put one foot on the floor, the awful fear thrusting him forward with unerring hand. And then he remembered. He was not to use them. On this simple expedient had Berry built his plans. By the use of the remedies he could control the hemorrhage and soon would be out of danger. It had always been so. Without them—without them he would die.

Berry fell back against the pillows. So it had come. That time which he had given his word to bring about, soon would be. Sanger. Sanger had not guessed what was hidden in that promise. Berry knew that. Only when it was all over would James Sanger come to know his plan. It would be too late then. Berry's parched lips parted in a grin. He smiled at the grim joke of it. He had outwitted them all so easily. No one need ever know, could ever know, why he had died. None but James Sanger. And James Sanger would never tell.

Berry lay there on the pillows grimly foretell-

ing the feelings of James Sanger when he knew how Berry Ward had died. The blood had ceased to come to his lips. He felt drowsy and languid. In the back of his head was a subtle thought which he was trying to put into words. Two or three times he almost had them but the drowsiness would drag them out of his reach like the undertow on the beach. Finally the words came back and stood out clearly for an instant, the sentence, the thought complete. He would be a hero only to his rival! Berry slept.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE Tuesday afternoon Auction Bridge Club had been meeting at Julia Brace's. The game was over and the women were standing about the room discussing the play. The Tuesday afternoon Club played for blood. It was small and composed of picked players. Penalties were exacted and rules enforced. It was not the custom to serve refreshments at these frays, since the playing did not cease until close to the dinner hour for most of the women. The members lingered only for a moment after the game to tally scores or discuss infringement of the rule. Julia Brace was standing by one of the tables in heated discussion with a woman whom she did not like and who had got into the Club, as Julia expressed it, only on the strength of her game. The woman's very cleverness and shrewd game exasperated Julia Brace and the point at issue was one in which the other woman was right. Julia Brace, therefore, would not give up her contention. Her guests passed into the bedroom and found their wraps and went out with a hasty word of farewell which Julia did not hear. But Julia Brace's guests were accustomed to her incivility. They

went out laughing together, amused at Julia's heat. Ferol came from the bedroom last, her fur coat on her arm. She had lingered to ask for news of the hunters. Gregory Worthington was punctilious about such matters. Ferol knew that Julia would be the first to hear of their approach.

The telephone bell rang furiously. Julia Brace gave no heed. It rang again and the other woman bolted to the bedroom, glad of an excuse to get free of her adversary. Scowling angrily, Julia Brace answered the summons. In a moment Ferol caught a word which made her listen. She heard Julia say, "What was the matter, didn't he get a deer?"

In a moment she was out in the hall and at Julia's elbow. She put her hand on Julia Brace's wrist.

"If it is Greg, I want to speak to him," she interposed insistently.

Julia relinquished her place hastily. "Berry didn't come in with them," she said; "they are at the Bar C ranch."

In a moment Ferol had the information which she wanted. Berry had stayed behind. He had not been well. He was the only one of the party to remain. Had he seemed seriously unwell, she questioned, and Gregory Worthington was forced to reply that he had been feverish and irritable. With a determination which surprised even herself, Ferol said, "Greg, I'm going out to him.

Yes, if you will. I'll come out to the ranch to-night in the car. The road has been mended; we can make it before sunrise. I will get some one to drive with me. Yes," she turned to Julia Brace and looked at her fixedly; "Julia will come with me."

Before Julia could protest, a look from Ferol's steely, flashing eyes silenced the words on her lips. The determined mouth, the fierce challenge of Ferol's eyes, denied her a chance to refuse. She understood that Ferol demanded it of her. This was the price she must pay for Ferol's silence. Ferol turned back to the telephone. She at once planned for Julia and Greg to go with her to the Lodge. She made her plans swiftly.

"We will start in an hour and a half," she said, "now, to-night. No, I can't wait. I'm afraid he—— No. We will get a good driver from the garage. Have horses ready so we can start on the trail at daylight. You will know what to take. Can't we get there by to-morrow night? If it were only moonlight! Well, we will have to take beds then and camp at the Corral. What food shall we bring?"

In half an hour Ferol had started her preparations by telephone and was speeding the car to town after a driver, one trusted to know how to make repairs and who knew the road to the Bar C ranch. Julia was beside her, wrapped in heavy furs, her riding things and toilet necessities thrust

into a hastily contrived war bag, Julia herself sulky and silent, paying the price with niggardly hand.

But Ferol was unconscious or unmindful of Julia's humour. Her active mind was covering the multitude of details for the success of her enterprise. Should she take a doctor? If Berry were not really ill, a doctor would throw him into a rage. If only there were time to get hold of Captain and Mrs. Pitney, carry them along ostensibly to hunt. Captain Pitney was one of the best surgeons at the Fort. But getting leave was difficult; there was no time for that. Ferol dismissed the plan of taking a doctor. She herself had become familiar with the use of Berry's remedies in nursing him through more or less serious crises. The remedies—had he taken them? Of course. Berry never went far without these things. But she would take others. Swiftly in her mind she went over the list of things to be taken from the medicine chest while the chauffeur ran the car at high speed to Meadowlark. Dinner was ready, Ferol had arranged over the telephone for that. She ordered thermos bottles filled with hot coffee, sandwiches for luncheon on the way in case they were delayed. While she was getting into her warm clothes and packing her bag, the chauffeur went over the machine with careful, practised eye and hand.

As they swung into the road leading to the

Bar C ranch, the lights creating a white tunnel into which they drove, Ferol leaned back in the front seat beside the driver, and began to think of Berry. Freed of the need of anxious inclusion of details, she found herself flat up against the thought of Berry's brick wall of ridicule. What if he were perfectly well, but in one of his black moods. What if he had stayed out there to fight the mood off, to be alone, or really to get his deer as he had protested. Berry would be annoyed, angry. She looked back at Julia Brace, lying on the broad back seat, a big strap fastened about her body to hold herself in place. Julia had decided to take a nap while passing over the good roads; later on it would be impossible. Ferol was in no mood to talk, least of all to Julia Brace, but some one had to go with her and Gregory from the ranch to the Lodge. It was easily a two days' trip. Ferol had used Julia Brace unscrupulously, but she was glad now to be free for a time of her conscious presence.

Would Berry meet them with scathing ridicule and scant welcome? It did not matter. Ferol intended to go on. Once there she would be able to meet his mood. She would plead a sudden passion for big game, a thirst for the open. Any excuse, no matter how trivial, would be a relief to sustain after knowing that he was safe.

It was not like Berry to remain behind. He was not such a keen sportsman as to wish to follow the

chase without the companionship which made the sport worth while. And in the weeks they had been out Berry had not killed. Berry was a good shot, a daring hunter. He was one of the first, as a rule, to bag his game. And he had been ill. The note of anxiety, rather than the words of Gregory Worthington over the telephone, had given Ferol the conscious grip of fear. Greg knew such attacks as Berry had; he realised the danger. In truth he had not been able to free his mind of the anxiety which increased as the distance lengthened between himself and Berry Ward. And by the time he had reached the Bar C ranch, Gregory had been unable to conceal his fear. He had been half in mind to go back himself after Berry, and was relieved when Ferol suggested this course including herself and Julia.

With nerves strung to a sharp pitch of anxiety, Ferol watched the road rise out of the darkness in the hollow tube of light in front of the car. How sharply the shadows cut, making hollows out of chuck holes, ridges out of the slightest inequality of the road. They were going very fast, the driver aware that he must make time while the roads were still comparatively smooth. Later, in the mountain passes, it would be rough going. Coming down over a pebbly hill, a tire went out with a swift wail, which sounded to Ferol like a pistol shot aimed at her heart. She held the lamp while the driver swiftly put in a fresh inner tube.

Another time, after midnight when they were passing through a narrow defile which led up to a mesa, the last long stretch to the ranch, the chauffeur was having trouble with the machine. He got out and worked with the carburetter. Ferol gave him some coffee and sandwiches. Julia Brace roused herself from her warm nest and sipped the hot coffee. She was in a better humour after her nap. She asked Ferol if she were not cold.

"Better come back here with me among the rugs," she urged, but Ferol was not ready. She was suffering from cold, in spite of the furs and rugs heaped over her, but she wished to be alone with her thoughts. They went on grimly, the car gliding up the mountain road in high as though bent on showing what a good beastie it was. The driver smiled appreciatively, but Ferol saw only the road into which they ate ceaselessly. Around them the blackness of the night pressed down like a merciless power. All was void but for this voiceless, resistless demon which repressed and retarded every turn of the wheel. Only they in the car, and the throbbing engine, existed outside of this cruel force. They seemed to stand still in the spotlight flashed upon them by this great unseen. Lips stiff with cold, hands icy under the ever-slipping rug, Ferol sat grimly. A spot of cold settled at the back of her neck between her shoulders. It crept slowly down her spine. Would they never reach the ranch? They were making

the journey with incredible swiftness; to her they had been on the road uncountable hours.

When the car drew up in front of the low ranch house in the thin grey dawn, Greg was out in a flash, and had them all in before the fireplace, where the hot embers of an all-night fire heated the room to the farthest corner. The light was growing in the east. Some one was stirring in the cook house. As she became conscious of feeling in her benumbed fingers and life in her deadened body, Ferol's brain suddenly ceased to operate its unceasing vigilance. She felt herself relax and was able to smile wanly at Greg over a cup of steaming coffee. She could even smile at the driver as he stood boasting with his back to the fire, giving the detailed account of the wonderful trip. She grasped that they had made a record drive, despite the delays. The chauffeur was proud.

Outside the trampling of hoofs and low voices of men, aroused Ferol's obsessing idea, to get there. She became alert and anxious again. She must rest. She sent the men away for a twenty-minute interval, during which she lay flat upon the rough-boarded floor, relaxed, making herself a weight, following out certain rules for relaxation which she knew. In an hour they were on the trail again, not without some jesting. The sun glittered upon one of those perfect October days which have no parallel outside of the high

country; dry, cool air, and the glory of the sunshine upon every living autumn thing. The exhilaration of the day and the surroundings put fresh hope into Ferol's heart. She began to laugh away her own fears, to predict with dry jest what Berry's reception would be.

Steadily the three rode on, a man with the pack horses always just ahead. Before sundown they crossed El Rey River for the last time, watering the horses thoroughly and pressing on as long as daylight lasted, to make a dry camp high upon the backbone of a ridge, where the hobbled horses lingered near, cropping the sparse grass. At dawn they were on their way again, Ferol with increasing eagerness and renewed anxiety. As they came down over Grumpy Mountain, the sun was still high in the heavens. It was midafternoon. The Lodge was glimpsed among the trees. Ferol's heart clutched with a sudden memory of James Sanger. The aching grief of the last days she had spent in these surroundings returned with the awful fear which gripped her, to crush her under a pall. As she neared the house, Ferol's heart began to quicken its nervous beating. She wanted to cry out to Berry, to hear his voice in reply, but she dared not.

In tense silence the three dismounted at the Lodge. Greg had noted the absence of smoke curling from the chimney; the complete silence with-

out and within. For a moment he thought that Berry and Martin might be off on a hunting excursion, but Berry's saddle hanging on a peg on the porch wrenched from him this hope. He opened the door into the kitchen. It was empty. He stood aside for the women to pass in. Ferol went in first. She stopped to listen, clutching her fist over her heart. Not a sound. Slowly she walked toward the door which stood wide open leading into the other room. Suddenly she almost ran. She hurried, seizing the door frame for support as she came to a standstill. Then with a choking cry she ran forward.

CHAPTER XXXII

BERRY had lain in a stupor most of the night. Intervals of consciousness were brief. These intervals were like dreams, lasting but a second, yet including a great length of time in his mind. In one flash he saw himself a small boy in the far-away nursery in New York. Agnes was there, a small round baby thing, while he was a growling bear circling about her preparing to pounce. At first she laughed in glee at the game. She grew frightened. She lifted her small chin and quivering mouth and frankly howled. He now pretended to attack her in real earnest. As he put his teeth into her chubby leg, he felt himself seized from behind by the nurse. His mother was there, bending over him smiling. She took Agnes in her lap and held out an arm, which she slid about the shoulders of the repentant small boy, whom she showed to the now laughing Agnes, assuring her that he was not a bear. This scene was as vivid as any happening had ever been in his life. And in his half conscious thought he grasped a fact of his own life, one which had never occurred to him until then; he had never been punished. The high-spirited and forceful mother who

ruled with so much self-control had never found it possible to punish this beloved son. She had used tact and cleverness which in time he had learned to meet with similar qualities, and in the end he had triumphed. Always he had done as he pleased in the end. And now finally he was still doing as it pleased him to do. In a mad, bitter, generous impulse Berry had willed to die—a moment of supreme self-sacrifice which was the fruit of the one beautiful flower of his life, his love for Ferol. He could not live and give Ferol up. Ferol—— Thoughts of her filled his conscious moments, flooded in upon him with tender memories. Now he was leaning over the counter at the Racket Store, and Ferol was looking out from under the laces, smiling provokingly. What high gaiety had been hers in those days! The vitality which found expression in her exuberance had bewitched him. He had felt from the first sight of her that almost unconscious primal desire to lay hands upon her, to draw from her for his own use some of that vigour, that vitality. He saw her again in the hotel room in Kansas City, cleaning her revolver. She looked up at him with the same dry smile to announce her hunger. How different she had always been from every other girl he had ever known! Her personality flashed before him as he lay there dwelling in the subconscious mind, showing the many facets, the bewildering charm.

Berry recalled the moment of uncertainty that

had been his on that morning when Ferol had stepped out of the chair car with her cheap suitcase. Just for one instant he had thought he might be making a mistake. Her crudeness, her queer ideas of honour—he drifted away into unconsciousness again. Berry's thoughts were fragmentary, hinging upon fleeting glimpses of the past, as though the long scroll of his days unrolled to reveal to him the trivial and vital happenings of his life. From time to time he became aware of these unfolding visions, only to lapse in the midst of some crucial deduction.

There was Ferol with Wils Junior. What a child she was! How she had loved the small sisters, the kid! He had had to make up to her for all this lack of affection, of child love for which she yearned. Had he——?

The surge of life thrust him up into consciousness once more. He looked about the room. The rafters appeared strangely remote. He thought of his hands. The last time he had noticed his hands, they had looked waxen, his nails bluish. He thought that queer. He would look at them again. But he did not. He could not find them. The walls of the room were pasted with pictures from magazines. Heads of actresses, fancy heads, wild west scenes from coloured supplements—what a lot of nonsense! Where was everybody? Why was he alone?

It was still daylight. He must have been having

a nap. Where was Ferol? His whole thought suddenly fixed upon that point. He wanted Ferol. He was uncomfortable. If Ferol would only come she would change all that, arrange his pillows, wipe his mouth with a cool, clean, damp cloth, put an ice cap on his head. She was so deft about such things. He wanted her. His whole consciousness fixed itself on that desire. He tried to call her. He could not move his lips. He felt himself growing larger and larger, a great compelling desire. He would make her come by this tremendous desire which swelled him. Ferol. Ferol. Ferol. He shut his eyes in concentrating the intensity of this desire. A sound reached his consciousness. With difficulty he lifted his heavy eyelids. Ferol. She was there, standing in the doorway. She wore her mountain riding clothes. Strange. Her face was full of yearning tenderness as she came swiftly toward him. Now she was near. Now her blessed hands were on his, warming their icy coldness. She was bending over him close. She must be on her knees by the bed. Was it a vision or was she truly there?

He tried to speak to her. Still his lips could not move. As though she divined his struggle, just as she always knew his wishes, she was wiping his mouth tenderly with a soft damp cloth. She put her hand on the brush of blond hair and leaned nearer. Her lips touched his brow. He was sure then. She was actually here beside him. A blessed

peace settled down upon him. He dropped his weighted eyelids slowly, he still felt her breath in his face. She was saying, "Berry, Berry." Her voice sounded a long way off. But she was close, he could feel her touch on his hands. Everything was all right. He would just drift away into this soft, beautiful sleep which he had been yearning for, this white peace. He was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JAMES SANGER came into his studio in Paris. He had arrived that morning from Rome, and had immediately rushed out on the boulevards, impelled by the same restlessness which had been driving him for months past. He could not work. He looked around the studio at the draped figures—unfinished work. In October he had fled the horror of them. He had gone to Algiers for the winter, intending to find fresh impetus in new scenes, suggestive surroundings. In vain. From Algiers after a month he had gone to Naples, where he had wasted a great deal of time and accomplished nothing at all in prowling the picturesque, filthy streets. Then he had gone with a party of friends on a cruise among the Ionian Islands. He had tried to lull himself into forgetfulness in the company of these good fellows, his friends, who proved to be as dry as ashes and about as capable of illumination. It was illumination that he needed. Some great light to make him see the world anew. For so long it had been dark and dense, filled with formless shapes. He had lost completely his sense of proportion. Things had ceased to have form, density. All that

he looked upon appeared flat and useless for his purposes. Was he losing his gift? Work. He must work. He walked about the studio savagely. He took the cloths tenderly from certain figures, only to recover them in disgust. For the past months, since his return from America, his work had been wretched; so weak that he was ashamed of it, yet he was unable to create anything better.

Sanger passed and repassed the long table where magazines and books, paper and parcels, were heaped in careless confusion. Finally he noticed what looked like a pile of letters under a bundle of newspapers. He took them up and looked them over languidly. They had followed him to Algiers, been returned to his Paris address. Months old some of them were. One from Jimmy Wagstaff caught his glance. He took it up eagerly, went to a big chair and sat down in it with a sudden impression of coming to rest. He cut the envelope hastily and unfolded the letter. Jimmy's neat and graceful handwriting filled the page, which was headed San Vincente, November 3. Sanger plunged into the letter with heart beating tumultuously.

"Dear Old Jim:

"It's raining like hell to-day and the light's too rotten bad to paint, so you're the dog. Autumnal woe has set in and we and Mother Earth are all drenched in tears. Old Berry's cashed in. Took us all by surprise too, as he was the last of the

bunch expected to go—he'd held on so long. But he went off on a hunting trip to the Lodge and stayed there. The rest of the party came in after a fortnight or so, but Berry wouldn't budge, pretended he was too tired or hadn't got his deer or some such excuse. Turned out the first was the right guess, though the fellows thought him sulky over poor luck, so left him with Martin. When they got as far as the Bar C ranch and telephoned in that Berry had been left behind, the little Texas Cardinal flew up in a rage and went out after him. She seemed to have a hunch something might be wrong; guess she knew his moods and tenses. And he had been in the habit of having these hemorrhagic attacks from time to time. But the poor little bird got there almost too late. Berry was passing out—and as he would have wished, with his boots on. He was alone, Martin having gone on Berry's orders to the Red Barn for supplies. Old Berry might have been saved, they say, if he had had first aid handy. But you never can tell. They all go like that finally—even first aids fail. Anyhow there was no one there to help him, nothing. And the girl found him there, she and the Worthingtons, whom she'd forced to go along. I'd like to have seen Julia Brace facing *that* climax. Details not forthcoming. Mrs. Ward went east with Père Ward looking like a wan ghost of herself. But she did not shut up the house, so there is talk of her coming back.

"The usual betting as to who will be Berry's successor has not begun, strangely enough, though several gilded and gaunt youths are planning trips east as soon as weather permits. All but me. I know when I'm out of the running. It is a gift

of genius to know. And until I can paint this atmosphere so it will palpitate and radiate and glimmer over mountain and desert, I'm on the job, right here.

"Julia and Greg seem to have taken a brace (no pun intended, honest!) over poor old Berry's death. Think they must have had a talk-fest from the way the little lady coos around Greg these days. Peace to 'em.

"I asked Mrs. Hill if she thought Ferol Ward would be the Joan of Arc of the woman movement in America. Her reply was characteristic. She said, 'Ferol will be so busy teaching her own sons and daughters to be good citizens of the world that she will not have time for leading the women of this generation. But her son or a daughter might in the next.'

"That is, after all, pleasanter to think of for the Texas cardinal, which is a bird of homing instincts though powerful in voice and beauty.

"What are you up to? I have gossiped away like a woman. Somebody said you were in Algiers. What the devil for? Are you going to work in bronze?

"Yours,

"J. WAGSTAFF."

Sanger crushed the letter in one powerful hand, and sat relaxed, his chin dropped on his chest. So —that had been Berry's way out. He had asked for six months. He had known that such an attack of the disease was bound to come in that interval. He had remained at the Lodge when the others had gone back to town, sent Martin away for sup-

plies, met the end alone, like the man he was, strong of will, determined and fearless. What a victory! With ready imagination and swift tendency to idealisation, James Sanger built up the scene of Berry's surroundings, visioned the power of Berry's last stand. Whatever his shortcomings, how great his weaknesses, Berry had emerged from this life in power of soul. He had made a sacrifice few men were capable of understanding, still fewer of executing. Berry Ward towered above him, assumed heroic stature beside which James Sanger felt himself momentarily puny and insignificant. Berry Ward was the better man; Sanger saluted the strong invisible spirit. What if Ferol knew this now and compared his own weakness to Berry's strength? But she could not know of Berry's triumph. She could never know. He had no right to tell her. It was Berry's secret.

Sanger got up and moved anxiously about the big room. He felt he must do something; he was impelled—to what? Ferol. He wanted to go to her. Not shame or decency or respect for the conventions seemed to him real barriers. He would go to the steamship offices, secure a stateroom. Sanger pulled himself up with a sudden jerk. He had no right to embarrass Ferol with his presence in New York at this time. He must wait. But how could he? He walked the floor up and down with long, furious strides. How could

he wait? He must know that all was well with her; know that she still felt the tie between them. That was it. He wanted to be reassured of her love, to make her feel herself his own, to call to her across the seas. He went out and sent a cable message. It read:

"Are you well? When may I come to San Vincente?"

Sanger tramped about like a mad man. He could not remember afterward where he had dined, whom he had met on the street, in the theatre, where he sat half through a performance which he did not see. He left the boulevards and tramped endless distances, lost himself in suburban Paris. He let himself into his studio in the early dawn. He waited impatiently for the bit of paper which came in the course of a few hours. It was even more brief than his. It was, "Well. In June," signed Ferol.

James Sanger laughed aloud. How like Ferol to go straight to the point, unafraid. He threw back his head and laughed while the tears of relief stood out in his brown, shining eyes. He drew deep breaths, found his hat and went out again. He trod the pavement like one whose weight was lifted from above. He went somewhere and ate heartily. He smiled at the waiter and gave him a tip, which made that sympathetic creature smile

with all his teeth in return. He smiled at the cat washing its face on the pavement. He smiled at the passers-by, who thought him mad.

Impelled by a force which he did not attempt to analyse, Sanger returned to his studio. He took off the cloth from a certain large figure. He stood looking at it. Suddenly he saw the flaws. In a moment he could make them right, a touch here, a stroke or two there. He seized a chisel and mallet and began to work.

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